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Office of the Vice President
(Atlanta, Georgia)

PRESS CONFERENCE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE PEACHTREE PLAZA HOTEL
HENRY GRADY ROOM
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

(AT 2:32 P.M. EST)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, I would just like to say what a pleasure it is to be here in Atlanta. I have got to say in the two years since I was here before, this hotel has been added to the landscape, and I am one who is tremendously interested in architecture. This is a very exciting experience. So that I am delighted.

I am very grateful to Mack, your State Republican Chairman, for his invitation and the opportunity to be here and attend the fund-raiser tonight to elect Republican Congressmen.

I think that this subject is one of major importance. I think people in the country have focused importantly on the Presidency and not as much on the Congress; and yet increasingly during the last years Congress has exerted both its authority under the Constitution and its influence in a way that has affected domestic and international politics and policies, to a point where I think we have a larger national focus on their actions and the responsibility of their actions in our foreign policy and our domestic policy.

So I would like to say that I think we need, because I believe in the two-party system, we need a greater balance there to give the kind of balance that this country has always had. We have two-to-one Democratic control, and I think that electing more Republicans to the Congress of the United States is going to be a very important part of this year's elections.

So I am just giving a little extra focus to that.

I want to thank Mr. Murrah and Nora Allen, your National Committeewoman, the Republican National Committeewoman, for their participation in this affair. So I am delighted to be here and delighted to answer any questions if I can.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, Rogers Morton isn't ruling you out as a Vice Presidential running mate and doesn't think that Ford should do that either. Do you still intend to stand firm in your position of withdrawal?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Or has the way been opened up now for you to change your mind and the President to change his mind?

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. I wrote my letter and that is where I stand.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, do you feel that Connally will be the Vice Presidential candidate of the Republican Party?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I tell you the honest truth, I think at this point the President has not made up his mind and he ought to wait until he is nominated at the convention. And when he is nominated, then he ought to take a good hard look at who can best serve the Nation, and at that point decide who. And I don't think that he has focused on anybody at this point.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, have you been promised any position in the new Ford Administration, if he is reelected?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir. Not only have I not been promised, I haven't asked for any. I am just relaxed and happy. I just want to serve my country. You can serve your country in many ways. I am very optimistic about the future. I think it is an exciting time to live. We have never had greater opportunities, creating the conditions for our own people and for humanity generally that will give greater respect to human dignity and equality of opportunity and freedom than we have today, if we have the courage and vision and wisdom to grasp those opportunities. I am delighted to serve in any capacity.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, even though you wrote your letter, could this too be looked at as a plug for President Ford?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I hadn't thought of it in that light. What I really wanted to do, and the reason I wrote the letter was to not have him under any pressure that would adversely influence anybody's judgment in trying to make a decision about the nomination.

I think that his courage and his determination and his great belief in the fundamental values on which this country was founded and the results of his courage in coming out to cut taxes, cut expenditures in the Federal Government, give the economy a chance to get back, and the results that are taking place, the reduction in the pressure on inflation, the increase in employment by two million people, the economic growth, are all testimonials to the success of his effort.

I didn't want him to be encumbered by someone else. There is only one President. The Vice President's responsibility is to preside over the Senate and being a staff assistant to the President. That ought not to get in his way.

QUESTION: Are you saying it is a plug then for President Ford, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, in the negative sense,

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if I can get out of the way, if that is a plug, yes.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, are you saying that you would not join the ticket if you were drafted at the convention?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: If I said yes to your question, then I am putting emotional pressure on the President because then he has got to think, "Well, maybe he wants it, and maybe I have to consider this," and I want him to be totally free and totally relaxed, just the way I am, so when he goes to that convention he is thinking about America and the world and our responsibilities and who can best serve him.

QUESTION: But you are not ruling it out, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I have written a letter and I wrote the letter in a way that was designed to take me out of that consideration. That is what I intended to do.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, C. A. Scott. I have observed national elections for about the last forty-some years.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You and me both.

QUESTION: And I am concerned about the extent that foreign policy and national defense is being injected in this national election.

Two former Governors, Reagan and Carter of Georgia, say we are second to Russia in national defense. Carter says if he is elected, he will let Congress have more to do with foreign policy. And I just want you to comment on that.

And it seems to me -- I will say this before you comment -- that the foreign policy is working pretty good because we have separated Egypt and Russia, and that was a key to all peace in the Middle East.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You have got it.

QUESTION: We have got them both on our side, so it looks like we have a good foreign policy.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You have a lot of logic in what you are saying. I think that, if I can be just as open and frank as you have been, that foreign policy has been the strength both in the reelection of President Nixon before he got into that tragic situation, and I think it is the strength of President Ford.

If you run against him in the Republican Party or in the Democratic Party, you have got to go after the guy where he is strong. And he is strong in foreign policy.

If his right-hand man in foreign policy is strong and popular, as Secretary Kissinger is, in this country, you

have to try to destroy him. But I don't think it serves the best interests of America. Therefore, I am with you.

Now if Mr. Carter thinks he is going to change this when he gets here and just turn it over to Congress, they have pretty well got ahold of it now, and I don't know what he is going to do with his time if he ever got there, because foreign policy is one of the major responsibilities of the President of the United States -- if you have read the Constitution. I think that is not a bad thing to read.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, do you feel that as Governor Reagan has become more and more critical to the Ford Administration, do you think he has gone too far? Do you think he has perhaps hurt the Republican Party's chance of holding on to the White House?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir. I don't know, whatever he called the 13th Amendment, was for the birds. What did he call it?

The 11th Commandment, excuse me. I get mixed up with the Constitution. I have to get back to the bible now.

The 11th Commandment; that was one of his fabrications that to me he has got a big personality and is a very popular guy and an attractive guy, and if he can keep it on the personality, keep away from substance, maybe that is all to the better and, therefore, that was a position.

Now when he was losing and he was not winning the primaries, then I think he had to get back to politics. But I think this is the whole basis of democracy, that we go into these political campaigns and everybody is trying to maximize their own position and minimize the position of the opposition.

But that is part of the game. The American people understand that. They are not dumb. The American people are very sophisticated. They understand these things. So I don't think there is anything to worry about in this.

I think it is good to debate issues. How do people learn about different points of view? That is the whole point of a two-party system -- crystalize the issue, present different points of view, and then let the American people decide. That is our system and it is a great system.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, Bo Callaway has always had a reputation for being a fairly ethical man. Do you think the media unfairly forced his resignation?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know about that. I know that we have got sort of a prosecutory trend in the media today, and particularly the press, because television is hot stuff, you know, with fifty-second and one-minute spots.

How do these poor newspapers compete with them? They have got to, and they have learned they can do these

in-depth investigations and that brings a lot of readers. I think frankly that sometimes it gets overdone.

I don't know, maybe he is just a victim of that. Who knows? It is a tough situation.

I know that the President has expressed himself as having total confidence in Bo Callaway's integrity.

QUESTION: Sir, you are scheduled for a series of meetings and gatherings with people here in Atlanta.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I am looking forward to it, too.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what this is all about? Apparently the press is excluded from most of them. What do you hope to achieve through these meetings, and also would you assess the President's chances in Georgia as you see them for the May 4 primary?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I can assess it a lot better after I have had the meetings. I want to put myself in tune with the people in Georgia. That is where the elections are going to be held. It is not going to be used up in New York. If I want to know what is going on in Georgia, I have to be in Georgia. If I want to find out what is happening, I want to talk to Georgians.

So I am here to listen and find out and learn, see. That is what I am here for. I think I will. After those meetings I will have a lot better idea than I do right now.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, the Republican Party has a stigma of being a party for the rich. Consequently, the minorities, the poor people, this is no party for us. How do we erase that distinction?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Just by being identified with the people and their problems and their concerns, their hopes, their aspirations, their fears and their interests.

I ran for Governor four times and was elected 15 years. I come from a minority party, so I got that feel of minority concern. We were a minority party by a million registered voters.

I have to say to you, sir, that I think the only reason I got elected was because I was concerned about people -- where they live, where they work, what their problems were, and how the government could play a legitimate role in helping them.

They didn't switch from Democrat to Republican just because they liked me. They must have switched because they thought I could do something. If they did the first time, and I didn't do it, then they wouldn't have voted for me the second time. When you got around to the fourth time, you have to believe maybe you are doing something right.

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QUESTION: Sir, since you wrote the letter, how active have you been in the office? What have been your duties at the President's direction?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: My duties under the Constitution are to preside over the Senate of the United States. It is a great honor and a great privilege. My grandfather was the majority leader of the Senate for 17 years, from Rhode Island. I am delighted to be there.

I am a staff assistant to the President, and I do whatever he wants and whatever I can do for him.

QUESTION: This sort of political mission like being in Atlanta again, are you picking up politics again?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir. I came here because I was invited by your State Chairman. I only do what I am asked. I am not pushing. I am not scrambling. I am just relaxed and happy and proud to be an American and confident about the future.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, in view of President Ford's several victories in the primary States, do you feel your presence or your exit has helped his election campaign and has your presence been previously a liability to President Ford?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Of course, you would have to ask him that because he picked me. I didn't ask for this job. After I was picked by him, then I had to go through something that, listen, if you had to go through it, you wouldn't be here, see; because if you had 500 FBI agents investigating you for three months like I did, all over the world -- not just in America but all over the world -- and answering those questions -- which is great; this is our system.

So when I was finally confirmed by the Congress, let's face it, it wasn't a Republican Congress; it was a Democratic Congress. What people forget is President Ford was nominated by President Nixon, but he was approved after his hearings by a Democratic Congress.

So that for the first time in history you have two, the President and Vice President, nominated by the Republicans and confirmed by Democrats. That has never happened before, you see. That is a very interesting situation.

There is a lot of merit to it, under the circumstances. I am honored to be there. I am just delighted. I won five cents from three reporters, if you want to know the truth, on the New Hampshire election. We bet five cents apiece. One of them has paid me.

QUESTION: Did you bet on North Carolina, Mr. Vice President?

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Not yet. I am waiting to have those meetings today.

QUESTION: North Carolina, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes. I thought he was going to lose in North Carolina. But I didn't bet on it. I don't like to bet. I don't like to take money off a friend.

QUESTION: If Mr. Ford lost in North Carolina, do you think he might lose in Georgia?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: He might lose some of the southern States. So he loses some southern States and he wins some western, northwestern, northeastern States. I think he is going to win the nomination.

If he won everything -- see, if Reagan hadn't come in and, as I said in Chicago, I was out there the day of the election -- I mean the primary -- and some of the party people called for Reagan's resignation. They asked me.

I said, "Well, as a politician" -- and I am not involved in this campaign -- "but as a politician, I have to say I don't think anybody has done more for Ford than Reagan." Because if it hadn't been for Reagan, nobody would have paid any attention. The Democrats had all the attention. This way Ford has been on the front page. He is out there winning; not just in Michigan but he can win all over the country. That is what a politician looks for -- a challenge and to win an election.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, how do you assess the Democratic candidates at this point? Do you think Jimmy Carter will be the nominee for the party?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I really have no idea. I am superstitious about this business of trying to tell who your opponents were going to be. I would never think who was the easiest or toughest. I always said whoever the Democrats are going to nominate was tough for me. I will do everything I can. If I get 50 percent plus one, I will win. Anything beyond that I will be grateful for. I left it at that.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, in the latest Woodward and Bernstein book there is a reference to the supposed fact that Kissinger in the final days of the Nixon Administration had certain papers transported to your estate in New York. Is that accurate; and, if so, would you comment on the circumstances that brought that about?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I can tell you it isn't accurate. It is totally a fabrication that there were two papers that got lost when Mr. Nixon took his papers out of the White House.

Whoever leaked the story to whomever they leaked it to, coming out of wherever it came from, he was upset about those two papers. They thought they could pin it on Kissinger, because I told Mr. Kissinger if he wanted to put any of his papers in our place in the country, he was welcome.

He put his Harvard papers there. I don't know what went on at Harvard, but he put them there. They said this. It was an absolute fabrication.

And you will be interested to know they have since found those two papers. The only reason they were lost is they were filed under the wrong heading. This is how you get rumors in this country.

What you need to do is get the answers and the facts and not mislead the American people. But I am glad I have been able to give you the facts on this one.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, how actively will you be campaigning for Ford in the upcoming months?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It depends upon how much I am asked to.

QUESTION: How can you be enthusiastic about campaigning for a man who doesn't hold you in his political future?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: What has that got to do with it? I am interested in the Republican Party. I believe in the two-party system. I love this country. I will do everything I can for America. I think he can do the best job.

I am not looking for anything. I have been very fortunate in this country, and all I want to do is to be able to show my gratitude and serve this country in whatever capacity I can. I think he is the best man. I think he is going to be nominated and elected.

QUESTION: How do you feel about the right to work law? Would you vote to repeal it if it was your decision?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: This law, you have different points of view in different States. If you are in a non-union State, you are for the right to work law. If you are in a union State like I am from, New York, or Ohio or any of those northern States where the big unions are, they are all against it.

We had a very clear case of this in Ohio where the distinguished Senator came out against the right to work law. I don't remember whether he was running for Governor after that or whether he was just running for the Senate again, but he made a big issue out of it. So he just got clobbered.

It depends upon where you are. It is like everything

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else; where you stand. Something is good for one State and something is good for another. I think this is a matter that is fine if the individual States handle their own affairs.

I am a great States' righter -- providing States assume their responsibilities.

QUESTION: Do you think Jimmy Carter has changed his position on that, trying to get the union vote?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: To tell you the honest truth, Carter is a very able man and he is a very able talker. It is hard to keep up with him, to tell you the honest truth. I have another job of my own so I haven't got time to get all of this stuff recorded and find out. But that is what you all do in the press, see.

QUESTION: Sir, would you address yourself to the subject of ethnic purity in statements by Mr. Carter and the President, and would you assess the effect on Carter's campaign?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: What do you mean by ethnic purity? Who is pure? I don't know what your ancestry is. Mine is a mixture of French, English and German. Now, am I pure or unpure?

QUESTION: I don't know. What is your feeling about President Ford's comment about ethnic purity?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't know what he said. I am really not clear what the implications of Mr. Carter's statement were.

You know, what worries me in this country, we get to pick one word and then we each interpret it differently, and then it becomes a slogan and it means totally different things to different people, and then we all go and act by it. I will be darned if I know how we can operate on that basis.

QUESTION: What about the policy backing that kind of a conduct, that the Federal Government should not support or actively try to integrate ethnically logical and coherent neighborhoods?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is our national policy.

QUESTION: Carter seems to be saying that he would think otherwise, that that should not be a national policy. What is your response to that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: So if that is his position, fine. That is his position. I don't think that reflects the American people's feelings on the subject. But he is entitled. This is a free country.

This is a great thing about it. We want to keep it free and let everybody express themselves. That is why democracy is so great. We can change governments when we

want to by ballots and not by bullets. That has got to be a major step in civilization. Let's keep it that way.

Whatever his position is, let's make it clear and then let the people decide. I think that the whole evolution is the other way.

QUESTION: Mr. Rockefeller, do you find it at all odd that several months ago the Georgia Republican Party was at opposite ends with you, they were urging your removal from the ballot, and now they have asked you to come down here to help them raise money?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Number one, I don't know whether they are urging my removal from the ballot. You know something I don't know.

If they can get someone to come here and help them raise money, what is wrong with that? Everybody needs it. Let's face it, this is something very important. This political business is very expensive. I am totally with him. I want to see a balanced Congress with Republicans and Democrats so you don't have what you have now, which is two-to-one in each committee, and where the Democratic Caucus is now superseding the whole structure.

This is the kind of thing you are not writing about. You are writing about Patty Hearst getting a cold, and we all know it. You don't know about this other stuff, see.

This thing is very serious. The Democratic Caucus makes a decision and then they tell the committees what they are going to do. That is not the way this Constitution was set up, in my opinion. I think it is something that we ought to hear more about in our papers and radio and television, because I think this undermines the whole ability of bipartisan representation to come to decisions which reflect the different points of view in our country.

We have a big country with different points of view. I think we have got to come out with balanced positions on that.

I have total faith in the American people. They are the greatest people in the world, made up from all over the world. It has proven to be a tremendous system.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, do you think the Carter candidacy has changed or had any impact on what the rest of the Nation thinks of the south in contrast to the leaders we projected in the past?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Contrary to what you think, we always thought very highly of the south in the north. I have always had a very high regard for it. So I think the south is one of the most important parts of our country; that there are great people here with great dynamism, with a tremendous sense of tradition and future and vision. So I just love

this country and I love all parts of it.

I don't know what Carter has done to change the image, to tell you the honest truth. Maybe he has, but it hasn't reached us yet in New York.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, up to this point in the news conference it sounds like you will do just about anything the party or the President tells you to do.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: As long as it is within my conscience.

QUESTION: What do you want to do, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I want to serve my country, that is all. I will do exactly what I think is right and nothing more and never have. I won't compromise myself on convictions and beliefs, on anything, for anybody.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, you know, I am about the oldest Republican in the house, among the oldest. I voted for Taft and Sherman and right down the line for the whole crowd, even Herbert Hoover. I am here in Georgia. I was reared here.

I don't believe I would be putting -- you and I had correspondence when you were a private citizen, when you were a Governor of New York, and you know some other things that you did for me.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I appreciated that correspondence and your friendship.

QUESTION: You know what Spelman has meant to us.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Named after my grandmother.

QUESTION: I don't believe I would be jumping the gun since I am interested, and doubtless I will not have a chance to face you again --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We are both young.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: I am wondering if it is ethics -- I didn't say ethnic --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is a very important distinction.

QUESTION: I am wondering would it be fair for me to ask you, since I am interested in you -- I am a Republican first and I am interested in Rockefeller second -- I am wondering if it would be bad principle or ethics if I asked you if a deadlock comes between Reagan and Ford about the fourth or the fifth ballot, would you accept a draft from us?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, you are very generous and I appreciate the implications of your statement and your friendship.

Let me say first I don't visualize that scenario. I think the President is going to get this nomination and I don't visualize this.

QUESTION: But I heard there was a convention when Al Smith was running and they had 101 ballots, and Alabama headed up for 24 for Underwood and they went right down the line for 101. Ted Reickert almost had to reject him to get hold of the stadium.

Would you get the party out of a dilemma by accepting a draft along down the line?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Let me put it this way: I was asked whether I would make a Sherman-like statement that I would never be interested in the Presidency again, I never would accept, and so forth.

I said, well, of course, I could make a Sherman-like statement, but I said, why should I? You know, it is a little bit inconsistent being Vice President, if I felt I did not want to be President or not being willing to be President. Then I ought to resign as Vice President. God forbid, something could happen.

So I am here relaxed and want to help in any way I can to serve this country. I have given you my prediction of what I think is going to happen. It is in hands above ours as to what is going to happen.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, Ronald Reagan has charged that the President and Henry Kissinger are going to sell the Panama Canal, which we now lease. What is your position on it?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: First, we don't lease it. At the moment we own it. The suggestion is by the Panamanians that there be a lease instead of an ownership because this is a question of an affront to their national sovereignty, and in this world today with the evolution and the breakup of the colonial empires and so forth, that this would be more in keeping with the dignity of our relationships if the thing was based on a long-term lease rather than on outright ownership. That is the issue.

This is one of those things where you can wave the flag. It is a small country. And we can talk tough and sound big and strong and alienate everybody in Latin America, which is what we are doing.

This doesn't make any sense to me. This is one of the sensitive relationships, like in a relationship of a family, like any relationship; you want it on a basis of mutual respect and mutual dignity and mutual interest.

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If it isn't going to last. It is just the same way. The tragic thing is what the Congress did about the business of OPEC countries. They took them all off the most favored nation clause on international trade. They added Venezuela and Ecuador.

Well, Venezuela and Ecuador didn't boycott us. They are our friends. But the Congress, and this is what Mr. Carter says he is going to support and give them more freedom to do more, so they took them off the list for the most favored nation.

So they sent up a delegation. The American community down there comes up. They explain to the Congress, the Congress could make a mistake in the drafting, you know. But this has been pointed out, and they haven't for one year and a half acted.

Now this and the Panama Canal issue are the two most serious issues. What they have done, every Latin American country has rallied behind those three countries against us. It is hurting our relations with friends for nothing.

In addition to that, the Castro government, which is a communist government, is fanning all through their communist organizations throughout the hemisphere. It is a very unfortunate situation.

It ought to be corrected, both of them. They ought to be worked out. We can work it out on a basis of mutually satisfactory relations.

Unfortunately, Mr. Reagan hasn't had a chance to get into this kind of thing before. He has been busy in California and busy making movies, making money, and he didn't have time to get into these things.

QUESTION: Earlier you said, and I quote, "President Ford might lose some of these southern States. So what?"

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I didn't mean it in a disparaging sense to the south, but I was talking about from his point of view in terms of the nomination. If I said "So what," I am not sure.

QUESTION: Does that mean that the Ford campaign has virtually written off most remaining States?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir, they have not. They are working very hard. I have nothing to do with the campaign. I am just talking as a politician.

But I am just saying that even if they did unfortunately lose some of the States, then in my opinion they have already lost that one, that is right, North Carolina. And this is a free country. Everybody has got to make up their own decisions as to how they want to go, and then these things work out.

I am just an observer. I am just like you. I have been around a long time. I am just observing the scene, trying to answer questions honestly.

QUESTION: This isn't a political question but I just want to know. I am a student at Spelman College. I would like to know what input do you have or does your family have into the college now?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Did you say what we have now?

QUESTION: Yes.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: My niece is on the board of directors. If I am correct, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund just a couple years ago or three years ago gave them \$5 million. I don't know whether you call that input.

(Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We have something to do with helping them. We believe and my grandfather and before him his wife and his wife's family, they had a station on the underground railroad in Cleveland, and they were abolitionists. And our family has worked, trying to give all Americans equal opportunity in health, in education, and employment, in every sense.

I think that is the basic strength of America. This is our strength. I think the south is doing a tremendous job and in many respects you are getting ahead of the north in the way you are handling it. So I have to take my hat off to you.

I am delighted to be here, and I want to thank you all for letting me be so frank. But this is the time to tell it like it is. This is what the young people do. We might as well all do it. We would be better off for doing it.

Thank you very much indeed.

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(AT 3:05 P.M. EST)