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[Sunday 1974]

THE PRESIDENTIAL ARCHIVES  
INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY CARTER  
BY  
HARRY REASONER  
ABC NEWS  
  
PLAINS, GEORGIA

MR. REASONER: Tonight we have the first of several reports on the Democratic ticket. We went to Plains, Georgia last week for far-ranging conversations with Jimmy Carter and Senator Mondale with the aim of finding the flavor and measure of the candidates before all the speechifying of a fall campaign begins. We hope to do the same thing with the Republican ticket immediately after the Kansas City Convention.

Jimmy Carter took me walking in a peanut field. He knows a lot about peanuts, and it is a good place to begin to understand him. This is his land but his real business is in buying and processing peanuts from other farmers. He is used to picking up a peanut plant for visiting reporters and explaining to them that they are vegetables, not nuts, really, and good to eat even in this fetal stage.

GOVERNOR CARTER: You see there is a peanut just starting out, where it came out. I guess there is one in the original form. See? That is the end of the little short pair. It starts growing up and gets larger and larger and larger and larger and larger and that becomes a peanut.

MR. REASONER: They are pretty good, in texture sort of like a sauteed garlic bud.

A family cemetery was a few yards away, which brought up the question of Carter's evangelical Christianity and whether a Baptist in the White House would be likely to demand Baptist standards of behavior and morals from everybody else. We asked him.

GOVERNOR CARTER: Moral standards, you know, are primarily personal in nature. One of the teachings of Christ in which I believe is that we should not judge other people.



One of the tenets of the Christian faith is that all of us are sinners, none of us are better than others, that though we are saved by God through grace, which means a free gift, not because of the good works we do -- and Jesus himself thought that we should not judge others. The expression he used in the Sermon on the Mount was, why be concerned about the mote or the speck that is in your brother's eye when you have beams in your own eyes? So, we are very careful to remember what Christ said and not to judge other people.

MR. REASONER: This family cemetery looks like it has been here a while. Your people have been here how long now, in this part of Georgia?

GOVERNOR CARTER: The people who are buried here settled on this land in 1833. This is my wife's grandfather's grandfather. His name was Jerry Murray and when the Indians moved out of this area in 1828, it took about five years to survey the territory and he was the first to originally settle it. I think my children will be the sixth generation on this land.

My own people came into Georgia, the Carter's did, the famous James Carter, incidentally, in 1767, and both my family and Rosalyn's family, who were born in the late 1700s, are buried here in Plains and they have never moved very far so far.

MR. REASONER: What does the land mean to you, Governor?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Well, when your family has lived in the same place on the same land for 200 years, and when all your relatives and friends live in the same small community like Plains, it is a very overwhelming factor in your consciousness.

When I am out campaigning anywhere in the country or when I was Governor in Atlanta, I had a strong tie back here from Plains to me. I was a professional Naval officer, went to the Naval Academy and served in the Navy 11 years, and had my roots not been here in Plains and very strong, I would probably have stayed in the Navy and never come home and never have gotten in politics. So, the land itself is very important to me.





In these fields around us here which are now worked by large machines and tractors, when I grew up until I was 17 years old and went to the Navy, we plowed these same fields with mules, we pulled every peanut plant out of the ground and shook the dirt off it by hand. We pulled every ear of corn by hand. We pulled the fodder first, we picked velvet beans, we put poison on every cotton plant individually by hand, and that experience and that consciousness is very vivid and very important to me.

There is stability there and an inclination to search out in your past things that ought not to be changed that I think derive directly from the land.

MR. REASONER: Most Americans now though won't die in the town or the county where their fathers died. Isn't that a vanishing breed, these people that stick to the land?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Well, perhaps so, looking at it from a nationwide viewpoint. But, looking at it from the perspective of Plains, Georgia, there is still a lot of that vanishing breed left.

MR. REASONER: Tell me this: Did you ever figure out what to do about the gnats?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Well, I learned about 30 years ago to ignore them. I don't even know that they are there.

MR. REASONER: They are there. (Laughter)

Tomorrow night we will continue this report with how Carter feels about some of the issues.

Governor, I don't imagine you are prepared to reveal your respective Cabinet today but I would like to ask you a few questions about what will happen if you are elected.

You have said you would reduce the size of the White House staff. President Ford said he would, too, but he has increased it since he said that. Do you mean it?

GOVERNOR CARTER: I do. It will be reduced if I am there. We are not making any presumption that I am going to be elected although I think I have a good chance to be elected, but we are making plans so that we can know ahead of time what responsibilities would be on the shoulders of Cabinet members and the responsibilities would be much greater than in the last few Administrations.

And we want to take out of the White House the palace guard aspect where all the functions of Government are run from within the White House itself. So the staff in the White House would be substantially reduced.

MR. REASONER: What about the personal White House staff? Would Hamilton Jordan be your Chief-of-Staff?

GOVERNOR CARTER: I haven't decided yet and don't want to talk about any particular persons until after the November election.

MR. REASONER: You made a number of commitments and promises in your acceptance speech, and then, speaking to Sam Donaldson (?) afterwards, he said, how long would it take, and you said you could do it in one term. Those are some of the things that I think every President I can remember has promised and asked for and cannot get through Congress. What makes you think you could?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Well, I have had experience as Governor in dealing with the legislature, and I am fairly cautious about what I have promised. I think I will have a closer relationship with Congress after the electoral process this year and if I am successful than has been seen in many, many years.

I think also there has been a great frustration built up and a disappointment build up in the minds of the American people at the constant squabbling, arguing, divisiveness, a lack of cooperation between the White House and Congress. There is a strong move among the people which is mirrored in the attitude of Congress and myself toward better consultation, better relationships, better respect, more openness. So, I think those things will force us to be cooperative.

The other thing is that there has been an absence of leadership in the White House for so long, in the latter part of Nixon's Administration, with the Watergate investigations, and then with Ford there has been practically no leadership exhibited from the White House. I think the Congress is looking for strong leadership from there.





We, in analyzing issues, this year, are using key Members of Congress and their staffs whom they recommend to work with us in deciding what ought to be done with basic tax reform, welfare reform, agricultural policies, transportation, energy and so forth. So I think there will be a good knowledge of one another if I am successful, and the other thing is I consider my word of honor at stake.

MR. REASONER: One of the charges you have faced a couple of times during the campaign is the charge that you have different faces for different audiences. I am thinking of your remarks about tax reform in your acceptance speech, and then last week your visit with businessmen in New York City. Some people interpreted what you said in New York as a backing away from your populous promises in your speech. How do you reconcile that, sir?

GOVERNOR CARTER: There is no incompatibility there at all. I am going to have the first year devoted to a complete revision of the income tax structure to eliminate loopholes and special privileges that have been enjoyed by the rich and the powerful entities in our society.

I let it be known to the businessmen, for instance, that I was going to do this. In the past a tax reform quite often has resulted in a cheating of the average American family because the reforms are shaped by intense pressure from special interest groups and the general public is not aware of what is going on.

I am going to be responsible as President for any comprehensive major tax reform and for acquainting the American people with the issues that are drawn. And if I can get the support from the folks back home with the natural inclination of many Congressmen, I think we can be successful.

MR. REASONER: Would as drastic a measure as a revolutionary measure of taking home mortgage interest off the deductible list -- would that be included in your program?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Well, we now have about \$10 billion in tax credits or incentives for the ownership of homes. I would maintain that incentive toward home ownership. I think, if anything, perhaps it needs to be expanded a little bit. But I would reserve the right to modify the mechanism used to give that credit.

At the present time, over 50 percent of that credit goes to less than 25 percent of the richer home owners. Those owning a very extensive home get a much greater credit. Those who are in higher income tax brackets get a much greater credit for home ownership. And if there is any change made -- and I think there will be some changes -- I would shift the tax credits or incentives for home ownership to the low and middle income families and to those who own one home. That is the way the reform should be done and that is what I will do.

MR. REASONER: I have a couple more questions. One relates to the fact that you in effect won the nomination very early, you didn't have to make any commitments on the Vice Presidency. Who do you owe when you take office, if you take office?

GOVERNOR CARTER: I have never made a private promise or commitment to any person, any special interest group or anyone. I believe I will be successful in going all the way through the November election with only one obligation, and that is directly to the American people.

I get a lot of advice and counsel from special interest groups, nurses, school teachers, farmers, laborers, and this is legitimate, and I feel obligated to those who give me support, but I will equally represent those who have not supported me in the general election. I believe I am strong enough politically, possibly because of my independent attitude in this respect not to be even tempted to depend on powerful special interest groups to put me in office. And I want to do that. I have promised, and I don't intend to break my promise, to let any commitments or promises that I make on future legislation or future action be known publicly. And I believe that I don't have to even be tempted to get elected.

MR. REASONER: Tomorrow we will hear from Carter on foreign policy. That will be different if he is elected, he says.

Now, continuing the report on Jimmy Carter and the Democratic ticket, we turn tonight to foreign affairs. In Carter's study in Plains, Georgia, last week we began by asking him about the current architect of American foreign policy.





Turning to foreign affairs, you have had your briefing from George Bush, not from Henry Kissinger, and some people thought when you referred to a "lone ranger" kind of foreign policy you might possibly have meant Henry Kissinger. (Laughter) Do you disapprove of him in some manner, sir?

GOVERNOR CARTER: Yes. I think Secretary Kissinger is a brilliant man and a good negotiator and has a good sense of humor. I like him personally. I think the thing I don't like about Henry Kissinger is that I don't believe he trusts the American people, our judgment, our common sense. I don't think he has a deep commitment to the views and high moral character of the people to be mirrored in what our country is. He is much too inclined to act secretly, excluding us from participation in the decision-making process and that includes the Congress as well.

Secretary Kissinger has been inclined to establish his own reputation with highly publicized and sometimes nonproductive trips to Peking seven or eight times, to Moscow five or six times. He has made decisions that affect our natural allies and friends, those in Europe, this hemisphere, Japan, without adequate prior consultation. Only recently has he shown any interest in the developing nations of the world. So those are some of the criticisms I have of him.

He has responded to some of my foreign policy speeches by saying he can't see any substantial difference between my attitude and that of himself, which is kind of a compliment to me. But there are some differences, primarily in getting the American people and the Congress to form a much better informed and a much more bipartisan nature of support of what our country is and what we do in relationships with other nations.

MR. REASONER: What would be some changes, what would be some differences between a Carter foreign policy and a Kissinger foreign policy apart from the form?

GOVERNOR CARTER: I would strengthen it in every way I could through relationships among European countries in the NATO area. I think Secretary Kissinger has been inclined to treat those nations as individuals and to discourage their closer correlation. I think a strong Europe, militarily, economically and politically would be to our own advantage. I would have a much greater emphasis on recementing foreign relationships that presently exist between our country and Canada, our country and Mexico, our country and the other nations of Central and South America.



I think we need to have a much more comprehensive approach to the problems of mutual defense. We have not reassessed now our relative contributions to NATO, I believe, since 1967, and there has been a tremendous technological improvement in weapons systems since that time.

I think we need to have reassurance to give to the Japanese and before we make any major immediate decisions as they relate to the People's Republic of China, or a shipment of crucial elements or commodities to Japan, like soybeans or coal, that we ought to consult with them. So these are some of the things that would be changed.

I would be inclined toward friendship with the Soviet Union and with the People's Republic of China, and I think that friendship ought to be based on strength. I would never yield in any way the full responsibility that would fall on my shoulders, which is the most important of all, to have a nation strong enough in its defense capability to guarantee the security of our country.

MR. REASONER: Secretary Kissinger recently began a new, quite different American policy in Africa. Would you approve of that policy of starting an alliance with the black elements in Africa?

GOVERNOR CARTER: I believe so. I think this was brought about belatedly by the abject failure of the Kissinger, Ford and Nixon policy, for instance, in Angola. We were faced with the realization there ~~when the Portuguese left~~ Angola that we had no policy that related directly with the people of that nation. We suffered because of it in that the Soviet Union and Cuba have now replaced us completely as a friend to the Angolan people. And I think in the aftermath of that debacle, which was brought about primarily by secrecy and a lack of planning and a lack of consideration of the needs of the natives of Angola, we have suffered. And in the analysis of that suffering or mistake, I think Mr. Kissinger has moved in the right direction.

MR. REASONER: For the past three nights we have broadcast filmed reports on Jimmy Carter made during a visit to Plains, Georgia, last week. Senator Walter Mondale, Carter's running mate, was there, too, staying in the farmhouse, seeing a few reporters, spending a lot of time talking to Carter. We stopped by the pond house to see Mondale and talk about how his feeling for his role has developed since Madison Square Garden.



Senator, every President in my memory has said that he was going to have a new and dramatically important role for his Vice President, and Governor Carter says that, too, and I believe he means it, and I am sure you believe he means it. Has anything come up about what kind of a role that would be? Has he any better idea than he did a couple of weeks ago?

SENATOR MONDALE: I am aware of that, and the key question I had when I came to visit the Governor some weeks back at Plains was just that, number one, what was his concept of the Vice Presidency, and, number two, were we personally compatible, and I came away convinced that he did want a role for the Vice Presidency and that we could get along and we could talk candidly.

Now, I recognize that a Vice President works for the President. He is not an alternative President. One of the things that encourages me is that we do get along very well, we are very candid, very open and we don't mind criticizing each other.

And in all these briefings I have been encouraged to participate fully. At our news conferences we participate in them together. Of course, time will tell, but at this point I am encouraged to believe this may be different.





MR. REASONER: You haven't gotten into specifics as to what title you might have?

SENATOR MONDALE: No, except in this sense: I told him I was interested in, first of all, the opportunity to participate in the major decision-making process so I could be heard; secondly, that I wanted some significant functions in both the domestic and foreign fields. I said that is what he wanted.

MR. REASONER: Senator, are you going to continue to make an issue of the Nixon pardon in the campaign?

SENATOR MONDALE: I think it is very important. You know I am not questioning Mr. Ford's motives. That is not the issue. But, that has bothered me from the time it happened, and I said so in my book in 1974. This isn't something I just said at that Convention.

There is nothing more sacred to American life than the notion of equality before the law. You know the Supreme Court words above the door in the Supreme Court building say, "Equal Justice Under Law," and that has bothered me greatly.

Now, I don't intend to just dwell on it. I think people know about it. You don't have to emphasize it all the time, and there are many other issues we have to talk about. But, that does bother me, and I am willing to say it.

MR. REASONER: Has Governor Carter warned you off it?

SENATOR MONDALE: No, he has said that he is not going to make it an issue, but he also said that he wouldn't have granted the pardon. We have decided that in our campaign, you know, that if we disagree on issues or disagree on emphasis, that we are just going to do it.

I know that that may not be believable, but we are going to try it. This old notion that a Vice President should just be an identical carbon copy of a President, I don't think it is believable. It certainly is not comfortable. I doubt that it is good Government. Of course, it is Governor Carter's Administration, but we are just going to try to be open about it.

MR. REASONER: Who would you rather run against, Mr. Ford and Mr. X or Governor Reagan and Senator Schweiker?

SENATOR MONDALE: I thought that over and discovered that even if I had an opinion, they probably wouldn't listen. I don't know. I have not had much luck in advising Republicans. Frankly, I think if we do our job well and if the American people see Jimmy Carter the way I do and the way those who know him see him, I think Governor Carter is going to be elected handsomely.

MR. REASONER: We reported every night this week on the Democratic ticket based on a trip to Plains, Georgia last week and talked to Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale. We noted we hope to do the same thing right after the Kansas City Convention with the Republican ticket, in each case an attempt to get the flavor of the candidates before the bombast and confusion of the formal campaign. It seems like a good idea now to do a little summing up.

Everybody knows by now that Plains, Georgia is a strange place to grow a Presidential candidate, but it doesn't really hit you until you see it. Here is a place which is really, in the old American phrase, 80 miles west of nowhere. And here is a man, a few years ago at least, with no powerful friends, no extensive record of public service, with no inherited background of wealth or culture or intellectualism.

Here is a man who decided a little over three years ago he could run for President and now has, according to the polls, a good chance of moving into the most powerful office in the world.

How do you judge him? Well, in a way Mr. Carter has made it easy. No candidate in my memory has said so many things flatly that he must either live up to or become ridiculous. Not since Dwight Eisenhower, for example, has a President asked for this kind of an image.

GOVERNOR CARTER: And the other thing is I consider my word of honor at stake.



MR. REASONER: And maybe never has a major candidate been so casually but determinedly religious. It scares some people.

GOVERNOR CARTER: The born again phrase is one that Christ himself used in explaining the doctrine that I just described, that the first birth is from your mother's womb, the second birth is when you are born into the Kingdom of God and under that belief we are all brothers and sisters on an equal basis as children of God.

MR. REASONER: And rarely has a candidate seemed so calmly confident that he can keep his promises.

GOVERNOR CARTER: I don't intend to break my promises to the American people. I suppose that is one of the most difficult things I will face, but I don't have any doubt that I will succeed. I have never made a private promise or commitment to any person, any special interest group or anyone.

MR. REASONER: So to mix some metaphors, Mr. Carter has either built his own triumphal platform in advance or carved his own petard to be hoist on, if that is what you do to petards. Of course, he can be forgiven if he is elected and find out that the United States Congress has not been born again.

But, in the areas that are largely under Presidential control, the Executive Branch, the forming of foreign policy, the openness of the White House and more than anything the area of strong and unequivocal personal honor and compassion he has -- well, he has asked for it.

It should be an interesting campaign.

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