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4435 WISCONSIN AVE. N.W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20016, 244-3540

FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT



PROGRAM The Today Show STATION WRC TV
NBC Network
DATE December 10, 1973 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

AN INTERVIEW WITH GERALD FORD

BARBARA WALTERS: When President Nixon announced Gerald Ford as his choice for Vice President to succeed Spiro Agnew, Congress was more than familiar with his name but few Americans knew who Gerald Ford was in spite of the fact that he served in Congress for twenty-five years. By his own definition, and his wife's, the Ford's are squares. The only indulgence that Gerald Ford admits to is a daily swim in a heated outdoor pool. He's also known to take an occasional skiing trip with his wife and four children. But most of the time -- excuse me -- [words unintelligible] to the office and home late with a stack of papers. And a very intense man is the way his children describe him.

You may be intense, I'm losing my voice. By the way, Mrs. Ford will be on with us in a special interview tomorrow.

Good morning, Mr. Vice President.

VICE PRESIDENT GERALD FORD: Good morning.

WALTERS: Being in political life as long as you have, I'm sure that you have become used to criticism, and that you begin to get a shell [?]. But the criticism, when one is in your position can be extremely intense, and I wonder how you felt, for example, when you read the papers which said that you couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time. Lyndon Johnson was supposed to have said that you played football too long without a helmet. Do you think this is hitting below the helmet?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, as you said, Barbara, in political life you have to get used to criticisms and I knew Lyndon Johnson, and he was a hard, tough guy. And when he got mad at you or didn't like what you did, why, he would sort of explode. But the next day if I saw him, he would -- he would never apologize, but he would bend over backwards to be nice and gracious. So I think you have to understand people. And the training I had in athletics where -- sports writers can be much more critical and devastating even than political writers, so that experience was very helpful and beneficial in understanding that you shouldn't



worry about what they write about you or say about you. It's the public or opponents that are going to go by what you do, and how you do your job rather than what they read or hear.

WALTERS: Of course, you don't hear the gracious part of it, you just hear that, and what they were saying was, well, the new Vice President isn't too smart. And I would have thought that a man who's been in Congress for twenty-five years would have been upset by that.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, I think you have to look back, and if you can get elected by 191 other Republicans to be your party leader for five elections, you must have some assets, some strong points that would convince 190-some other politicians that you'd be a fair leader.

WALTERS: Let's get to know something about you personally. What do you like to read?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I must confess I do most of my reading in the work that I do. I read, oh, seven or eight newspapers a day. I read lots of material that comes in from the office. But on the other hand, I'll get interested in a book that has come to my attention. I got to know Frank Capra, the great movie producer, out in California last year, and he gave me a copy of his autobiography, which I was fascinated with...

WALTERS: [Words unintelligible]...

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: ...It was a wonderful book, and particularly having known Frank, himself. Or I'll pick up something else that just strikes my fancy and read it very quickly and really enjoy it. It's not an organized effort. It depends on who I met or the circumstances that prompt it.

WALTERS: Do you have time to go to movies?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I'm not a very good moviegoer. Honestly, my wife enjoys movies, and I guess we go about twice a year, and I do it quite reluctantly.

WALTERS: What about music?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I enjoy it, although I confess I'm not an expert. I do like to go to the opera. I do like to hear the symphony. Even though I don't understand the music, there's something about it that interests me and exhilarates me.

WALTERS: You're a very hard working man, and your children describe you again and again as intense, even though



they have said that you do find the time for them. You're obviously in good physical condition. How do you relax?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I relax by playing golf. I get on the golf course, I concentrate. When I ski, I like to ski alone, to be honest with you, because we get enough phone calls, we get enough people in the office, so when I ski, I like to go off by myself, not in a class, not where you've got others that are interfering with your activities.

WALTERS: They'll find you on that -- now they'll find you on that...

[Laughter].

WALTERS: Mr. Vice President, you -- you admitted this year that you went to see a psychiatrist whom your wife had been seeing because she was feeling some tensions from a pinched nerve. And there was a good deal of criticism, as though going to a psychiatrist was something that perhaps made a man not a viable Vice President. Will you comment on that?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I did go to the psychiatrist that my wife had been going to for about a year. She had a very bad nerve problem in her neck that was creating great tension, and the psychiatrist suggested that I come and talk with him I think three times in twelve months.

WALTERS: But do you think there's anything wrong...

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: No...

WALTERS: ...with a person who holds a public office seeing a psychiatrist?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Not at all, because people in public office do get under great tension, and psychiatrists are supposed to be able to help you understand the problem and therefore relieve the tension so you're better able or better qualified to do the job. I don't see anything wrong with going to a qualified psychiatrist for treatment that might be helpful in relieving the anxiety or the tension of the job. I think it's unfortunate that so much emphasis is placed in the wrong way. I said that I personally was somewhat disgustingly sane, but I don't think that if I had a problem I would be reluctant at all to go to a first class psychiatrist.

WALTERS: Do you think that's a problem? I mean, do you think that you're too sane, too square, too almost...



VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, I said it in sort of a quip, because some of the news media...

WALTERS: Do you wish you were more colorful...

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: No, I really don't. Because I'd rather be sincere and get the job done, rather than have sort of the charisma that some people think is important to be a politician.

WALTERS: Have you heard from Vice President Agnew recently?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: The night that I was nominated, Mr. Agnew called me. In fact, he was the first person that called me and congratulated me on the nomination, which I thought was very thoughtful. He and I were, and still are, good friends. Mrs. Ford got a call from Mrs. Agnew the day that I was sworn in, which I thought was extremely gracious and nice on her part...

WALTERS: Just the other day...

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Just the other day, yes.

WALTERS: Do you feel that the former Vice President was treated too harshly? You all were close friends, are close friends.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, that's a very hard question to answer, Barbara. I was a friend of his, and I still am. Obviously there were some things that I didn't know and others apparently didn't know. I did give him advice and counsel at the time prior to the resignation. I understand, because those of us in political life do see things happen, we don't condone them. I think we have to be sympathetic and understanding and I regret the whole situation, but he made the decision to do what he finally did, and...

WALTERS: Was that your advice?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: No, it wasn't, because I didn't know all the facts at the time. I did try to help him when he asked for assistance to go before the House of Representatives, and let the Committee and Judiciary undertake an impeachment hearing. That request was turned down, and so I think when that was turned down, then the former Vice President had to face up to things he knew that I didn't know.

WALTERS: Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for being with us, for talking frankly. There'll be a lot of interviews



like this, and they don't seem to trouble you very much. You seem to have an equanimity, but after twenty-five years in public life I'm sure this isn't too difficult for you.

Thank you for being with us.

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FRANK MCGEE: Gerald Ford assumes the Vice Presidency at an extraordinary moment in history, a time when the country faces an array of crises, and the Vice President, of course, is no neophyte in politics. He served in Congress for twenty-five years, and the last nine of them as the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives. But he comes to high office at a time when the first poll ever commissioned by a Senate Committee finds that public trust in the leaders of most American institutions has fallen, and fallen sharply, and confidence in the White House, in particular, has plummeted to what may be an all time low. Only nineteen percent of those polled expressed, quote, "a great deal of confidence in the President or other leaders of the Executive Branch of Government."

Vice President Gerald Ford became a member of that Branch only four days ago, and we appreciate you joining us this morning, Mr. Vice President.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Thank you, Frank.

MCGEE: First, this question. A number of Republican Congressmen have indicated that they were really only waiting for you to be sworn in as Vice President before they began to demand that the President either resign or be impeached. Would you comment on that?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I'm not so sure that number is as large as has been implied by some. I'm sure there are a few. But I hope that my confirmation doesn't mean the demand for the President's resignation or impeachment will increase, because I want to be Vice President, I want to help the President, I think it's important that his programs continue, and I think he's the best person to implement and execute those programs, particularly in the area of foreign policy. I think the Nixon Administration has done a superb job.

I don't see how the country could be strengthened by having another change at the top. I think it's better to let me work with the President, and continue his policies, rather than go through a traumatic experience of resignation or impeachment.



McGEE: Is this going to make things awkward for you though? Is the President going to be faced with the problem of using you just enough, but not too much?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I don't think so, at least I see no reason why it should. I have spent a good bit of time in the last several months with the President in personal conversations, in private, and I've known him twenty-five years. He knows me, I know him. Our views are almost identical in many areas. Where we differ, I've expressed them, but I'm looking forward to working with him as a teammate, not sitting in the wings waiting to take over.

McGEE: Did you ask for or were you given any assurances of independence by the President?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: He knows me well enough to know, Frank, that if I don't agree with him, I'll be very strong and hopefully persuasive in convincing him that what he thinks he ought to do, my views will have some impact, and he knows very well I'm not going to sit there and accept what his other advisors recommend or what he believes, because I haven't done that in the past -- act as a rubber stamp. I've had differences privately with him, and I've had public differences. I don't anticipate that he'll expect me just to take orders. I don't act that way, and I don't intend to.

McGEE: I realize it would have to be a matter of considerable importance, but if you found yourself in disagreement with the President privately and he did not accept your advice and it was a matter that was important to you, would you feel that you could make your disagreement public?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Yes, but with some, I think, good taste. I wouldn't go out and make it a crusade, for example, seeking to undermine the Chief Executive, because I think the public needs the President to have the public behind him. But I would, I hope, with good taste and some discretion indicate my differences, but then let the public decide whether I was right and whether I acted properly.

You can't -- I've used this phrase before and I guess I've been criticized for it -- you don't win a ballgame by tackling your own quarterback. Only one person can basically call the plays, you have to have an input in the huddle. You have to have an input in the Oval Office, I expect to have it. But after the Chief Executive has made the decision, I think within reason, you have to be a team player.



McGEE: Senator Harris of New Jersey, who took up that analogy, has said, suppose your quarterback were running for the wrong goal. Would you tackle him?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Of course I would, but I'd first try to do it in the Oval Office or in the Cabinet Room where I could freely express myself without making a public scene. But as long as you have that input I think you ought to maximize your efforts to be a part of the team, and if you don't agree then I think you ought to with descretion and good taste, take an opposite point of view.

McGEE: The President is engaged in a project now -- [words unintelligible] easily, more and more information than any other President's ever given about his personal finances. Yet a panel of Washington newsmen who we had on our program this morning, echoed, I believe, the sentiments of a good many Americans when they said, that though the President had done nothing legally wrong, he seems to have a moral numbness that doesn't tell him that although this is legally alright, it is, in fact, a wrong thing to do. Now, how would you respond to that criticism of the President?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I'm sure there are many Americans who are disappointed in something that was perfectly legal, and I believe it was, and despite the fact that the President has been more frank, shown more candor than any other President in the divulging of all his financial dealings, and so forth, who are disappointed. But I think they ought to give him credit for his frankness and his candor. And I wonder if those Americans who are critical, if they were in this same position he was, would have done differently.

You know it's nice to sit on the sidelines, and say somebody was unethical or somebody did something that was a little on the unethical side. If they were in the same position that he was, how would they have acted? And that's the way we really ought to judge it, Frank.

McGEE: Perhaps so, Mr. Vice President, but the people seem to expect a higher standard of behavior from public officials, particularly the President of the United States. Could he not have been more sensitive to that aspect of it?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, I think he is disappointed that there is this reaction, and in order to overcome that I think he and Mrs. Nixon have made a very good decision that in light of this development they have made a commitment to give to the United States Government, to the American people this very beautiful home and estate they have in California. I think that is a judgment



on their part that I hope will overcome this doubt that some people have about the propriety perhaps of the taking of the tax deduction with the transfer of the papers. I think this is a very generous effort on the part of the President and Mrs. Nixon, and I think in doing so they hope to overcome this doubt that's been raised by the people you mentioned, and I think by many Americans.

McGEE: You've been in public life for twenty-five years. You're a fairly keen student of public reactions, or you couldn't have survived that long. Do you think this campaign will be successful as it continues to bring to light situations such as his own personal finances?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Public pressure has resulted in an operation candor, and did result in the President making a total and complete exposure of his financial dealings and his tax returns. I have often wondered how any other President, his predecessors would have reacted. I'm not critical that it wasn't insisted on in the past or that others didn't do it voluntarily, but I think it's a -- the President should be commended for doing so, and I think the other things that are coming up in operation candor, the white paper, so to speak, or a full disclosure of the ITT, the milk fund operation. I think the public will admire a person who lays it all on the table, and in comparison to all of his predecessors that I've known, I think he's doing more in this regard than anybody else.

McGEE: I don't want to harp on this, but it seems that with each effort the President makes he becomes more mired down. Suppose it happens that the white papers, on the ITT and the milk fund case, are no more effective than what appears to be the reaction to his disclosure of his personal finances?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, then I think you have to look at the other side of the coin, Frank. The American people, at least in my opinion, ought to look at the tremendously effective things the President has done in the field of foreign policy. Shouldn't they say, well, the President ended the war in Vietnam, he's brought the POW's back, he's brought the troops back. He's doing a superb job in the Middle East. Isn't peace more important than some of the nitpicking that I think seems to go on and on? You have to put on the scales, what's more important than peace? And when the scales are -- when the scales reflect peace as being far more important than some of these other things, I think public opinion will turn.

McGEE: You met with Israel's Defense Minister Moshe Dayan at your own request. And I wondered if you believe that



Israel is going to this Geneva Conference on December 18th, with a sufficient willingness to withdraw from certain occupied territories to give some reasonable prospect of a permanent peace or at least, a seeming permanent peace in that part of the world?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Well, I am guided in this regard by what General Dayan said, I think, yesterday, and may have repeated today, that Israel is willing to make some territorial adjustments. That is a somewhat different attitude than they've had before. I think it's also a further indication of their willingness to agree with the UN Resolution-242. I hope that the Arab nations will also go to that peace conference indicating their support for UN Resolution-242. That's the first real document that indicates that Arabs and Israelis are willing to sit down, in the first instance, and hopefully negotiate. So I'm quite optimistic in the initial stage, and hopefully in the longrun.

McGEE: Do you feel comfortable with foreign affairs?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I do. I've had more experience in it than I've been given credit for. I've travelled extensively and as you, I'm sure, remember, went to the Peoples Republic of China last year and had a superb exposure to that vast country, had an opportunity to talk with Chou En-lai, and all of his assistants across the land. I've been to a number of international conferences. My principal work in the Congress before getting to be Minority Leader, was in the field of foreign and military policy. So I am comfortable because I've had a background that gives me a knowledge that I think most of my colleagues understand I have, and unfortunately a few of the news media didn't recognize.

McGEE: I'm sure we make you uncomfortable to be described as conservative in your voting record in the House...

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: No, no...

McGEE: But now that your constituency, as it were, has been enlarged many, many times over, do you think you might take perhaps a bit more liberal view on some domestic policies than you've had in the past?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I think that would be a natural development. My constituency in Michigan was conservative in many respects, particularly on fiscal affairs. I think that is important. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't have a somewhat broader view on other domestic matters, as you look at the whole United States, 434 other districts, and some of them in metropolitan areas do have special problems that my district didn't have.



And in the new job I have, I'll be surprised if I'm not broader, and I'll be disappointed if I'm not.

McGEE: You've also committed yourself -- some of your friends thought you should not have -- to not running in 1976. That's still a good deal of time between now and then. Is it possible you'd change your mind?

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: I see no circumstances, Frank, that would justify a change in my mind. I -- primarily because I think I can do a better job in the next three years as Vice President if I concentrate on that rather than seeking to organize delegates in this state or that state. It seems to me that the best job I can do is to help the country and the President, relations with the Congress being emphasized, and if I'm out rounding up delegates and organizing a political effort in my own behalf, I undermine what I'm really trying to do.

McGEE: Mr. Vice President, thank you, and congratulations, and good luck.

VICE PRESIDENT FORD: Thank you, Frank.