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#36
9/18/76



PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 36

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

12:43 P.M. EDT
September 8, 1976
Wednesday

On the South Lawn
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning.

I have a very short opening statement and then we will get to the questions.

I met this morning with Secretary Kissinger to discuss his report on his meetings with Prime Minister Vorster and with European leaders. On the basis of this report, I believe that good progress has been made on the problems concerning Southern Africa.

It is important to understand that in this diplomatic process now unfolding, the United States is offering its good offices as an intermediary. We are willing to present ideas on how progress can be achieved, but we are not -- and I emphasize not -- trying to develop a specific American plan.

We have three objectives: First, to prevent an escalation of the violence which in time could threaten our national security; second, to realize popular aspirations while guaranteeing minority rights and insuring economic progress; third, to resist the intervention in the African situation by outside forces.

In his discussions with Prime Minister Vorster, the Secretary put forward some ideas conveyed to the United States by black African leaders, and Prime Minister Vorster gave us his reactions. As a result of these discussions, Assistant Secretary Schaufele is currently in Africa discussing the situation.

On the basis of his report, I will decide whether further progress can be made through a visit by Secretary Kissinger to Africa, starting with black African countries most concerned. We want to create the opportunities and conditions for all races to live side-by-side.

The United States cannot solve by itself these complicated problems. We need the continued goodwill and dedication of the parties involved.

The process that is now beginning is an extremely important one. It is extremely complicated. There is no guarantee of success. But, I believe the United States must now make a major effort because it is the right thing to do. It is in our national interest and it is in the interest of world peace.

I will be glad to answer any questions.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, when you selected Mr. Dole as your running mate, did you make a thorough check of his finances over and beyond, independently of what he gave you, and how was that done? Was it done through Justice, or where?

THE PRESIDENT: The Office of White House Counsel made a very thorough investigation of all of the individuals who were being considered for the office of Vice President. That was done by demanding that they send to us various information concerning their finances and related matters.

Subsequent to that information being furnished, a member of my staff at the Office of the White House Counsel interrogated the individuals who were being considered, including Senator Dole. As a result of that interrogation and information voluntarily supplied by Senator Dole, it was concluded by the Office of the White House Counsel that all things were in order.

QUESTION: Mr. President, have we gotten a fair sample of your campaign this week, or do you have something else in mind for the future?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say at the outset, Mr. Cormier, that I decided a long time ago -- in fact, when I made my first announcement that I was a candidate -- that the principal responsibility I had was that of being President of the United States, and I intend to carry out that responsibility.

Secondly, we have a campaign strategy that will unfold in the days and weeks ahead. It is a strategy that we will adhere to and it is one that has been thoroughly worked out and definitely determined, and you will see how it evolves in the time ahead.

QUESTION: Mr. President, was it your suggestion that the first debate be held in Philadelphia and, if so, why?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, I wanted the debates to start today and we weren't too particular where the location might be. We are certainly in agreement with Philadelphia being the first site.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter said today your position on abortion and his are fundamentally the same. Do you agree with that? And, secondly, do you think the issue should be debated at all in the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the Democratic platform and the Republican platform on the issue of abortion are quite different. I subscribe to the Republican platform and Governor Carter subscribes to the Democratic platform. His position and mine are not identical. My position is that of the Republican platform and I will stick with it.

QUESTION: But that was not your position before.

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I think -- if I might correct you, Ms. Thomas -- the Republican platform is my platform. It is one that coincides with my long-held view.

QUESTION: Do you think there should be a Constitutional amendment against abortion?

THE PRESIDENT: I have had the position for some time that there should be a Constitutional amendment that would permit the individual States to make the decision based on a vote of the people of each of the States.

Mr. Rogers?

QUESTION: Mr. President, are we any closer to a second SALT agreement with the Russians and, if so, what are the prospects for such an agreement before the election?

THE PRESIDENT: We are continuing to work on the negotiations for a SALT II agreement. A good agreement would be in the best interest of the American people and the world as a whole. The decision on whether such an agreement is signed will have no relevance whatsoever to this current political campaign. We hope that such an agreement can be achieved as soon as possible.

QUESTION: What would you say the prospects are, please, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I think they are gradually improving, but we have some very difficult problems yet to resolve.

QUESTION: Mr. President, don't you feel there should be a law that limits what an incumbent President can do in the way of spending time, spending money, and use of employees of the White House and vehicles and other taxpayers' resources on his campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Congress has made its decision in that regard, Sarah, and I will, of course, always abide by the laws passed by the Congress.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you feel that you are in any way perhaps abusing the power of this office by controlling the media, to use the media as it were to make statements daily on one subject or another?

THE PRESIDENT: I apologize if I am using the American press. I am trying to do the job as President of the United States and I hope that between the American press and the President we can convey important information to the American people.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, Governor Carter and Senator Mondale and Labor Leader George Meany have all in recent speeches, in criticizing your economic record, referred to the Nixon-Ford Administration, thus lumping the two together.

Would you prefer to run on your own economic record rather than being associated with the Nixon economic record, specifically imposition of wage price controls?

THE PRESIDENT: The Ford record is the record that I will run on, as far as foreign policy is concerned. To take the particular matter that you mentioned, I have consistently said and I reiterate, that wage and price controls will not be imposed by this Administration. This Administration has had a good record in handling serious and difficult problems in the domestic economic field.

We have added four million new people working in the last 12 months, 500,000 more in the last two months, so I will stand on my record, which I think is a good one.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been some questions in the last few days about Senator Dole. Have you had any contact with him on that subject, in particular about the control of money or have you attempted to satisfy yourself anew about this, or perhaps your staff?

THE PRESIDENT: The statement made this morning by Mr. Wild, I think clarifies the situation very dramatically. Senator Dole was in the Cabinet meeting this morning and my staff has been in contact with his and we are satisfied today, as we were at the time we made the initial investigation of his campaign finances.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the unemployment rate has gone up for three straight months. What, if any, plans do you have to deal with this problem, should it continue to rise?

THE PRESIDENT: Our answer is to increase the number of people working, and as I indicated a moment ago, we have added 500,000 more people working in the last 60 days. In addition, we have 88 million people working today, an all-time high. We are going to continue to emphasize that more people are working and more jobs are available. I am convinced that with our successful efforts against inflation and more jobs, the American people will subscribe to that economic policy.

QUESTION: May I follow up, Mr. President? Do you think the fact that unemployment is high in this particular period, just before the election, may harm you politically?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the American people are more knowledgeable, more sophisticated -- they know that employment is going up every month and that as long as there are people being hired and as long as the layoff rate continues to go down, the American people will be supportive of the economic policy of the Ford Administration.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this afternoon 40 Congressmen from 14 States and the District of Columbia are meeting. This is the newly formed, as you know, Northeast Coalition. What can you say to them were you to send a message to them? They are concerned about industry leaving the Northeast. They are concerned about -- I heard what you said to Aldo -- but they are concerned about joblessness, not people with jobs. They are concerned about urban plight. What do you say to that?

THE PRESIDENT: We have a good program to try and rehabilitate our major urban cities all throughout the United States, including the Northeast -- our revenue sharing program, our community development program.

I signed, after a great deal of work with the Congress, a mass transit bill that is very helpful and beneficial to major industrial centers throughout the United States. We will be glad to work with any group geographically or otherwise, including the Northeast group, to try and help in that regard.

QUESTION: They also say, Mr. President, they are not getting a fair share of the Federal dollars. You mentioned mass transportation. They say they are getting 15 percent of the dollars whereas there was 40 percent for mass transportation in the Northeast.

THE PRESIDENT: I am not familiar with those particular statistics but those funds are released based on laws passed by the Congress. So, if there is a problem in that regard, I think the basic law has to be amended.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you evaluate the debates as a factor in the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: The American people will be the winner and I am anxious that they get started as quickly as possible, and, as I indicated earlier, I proposed the first one be held today.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a related economic question. The steel companies have rescinded a price increase on flat rolled steel which is a principal component of automobiles. Would you like to see this followed by a similar reduction or rescission of the increases in automobile prices recently announced by the automobile companies?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope the automobile manufacturers would take that into consideration.

QUESTION: I would like to ask it in the framework of the fact that although you are claiming success against inflation, the industrial component of both wholesale and retail prices continues to rise, and this is the component that once it is up it does not go down. It is not volatile like food prices. With respect to the automobile companies, the other basic manufacturing segment of the economy, what would you like to see done? What do you think ought to be done? Or do you think anything needs to be done to try to stabilize the industrial component?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe that the wholesome competition in the American free enterprise system will solve that problem better than any other way.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what sort of preparations are you making for these debates? Do you, for instance, have one of your aides acting out the role of your opponent so you can get ready that way?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all, Fred. I am obviously doing a great deal of study and preparation for these debates because I want the American people to know not only my own views but the views of Mr. Carter, and I think the best way for that to take place is for me and for himself to set forth those views, and that will be done in three debates.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what is it you are doing in preparation? Are you studying some of Mr. Carter's statements? Are you watching videotapes of Governor Carter?

THE PRESIDENT: The matter is being thoroughly studied by me comprehensively.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you mentioned the African guaranteeing of minority rights. How many black governments in Africa do you regard as having shown minority rights or respected them? Could you name some, and how could you go about guaranteeing such minority rights in the future?

THE PRESIDENT: I think in the plans that will evolve -- and I hope they do -- there will be adequate protection for minority rights in the two areas being considered at the present time.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what went into your judgment not to fire or reprimand the FBI Director in light of the questionable allegations raised against him?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer the Kelley matter this way: I was disappointed, to say the least, with the two responses given to the Kelley questions to Governor Carter. One, I think it showed a lack of compassion in the one statement, and a second statement that seemed to be contradictory of the first one.

I hope that Governor Carter understood that Mrs. Kelley at that time was suffering terminal cancer and that was a very sad and difficult time for the Director of the FBI. Number two, I was confused when in either Connecticut or Brooklyn he said that if he were President yesterday he would fire him, and then at the next stop he would not indicate whether he was going to fire him or keep him if he became President on January 21. So, I am confused on the one hand by his flip-flop on this issue, and I am very disappointed at his lack of compassion on the other.

Now the recommendation made to me by the Attorney General after thoroughly investigating the facts was that the circumstances were such that the FBI Director should be kept. He has reimbursed the Federal Government of \$35 (\$335), I think, for the furnishings for his apartment, and he has done a good job in my opinion in straightening out a very difficult situation in the FBI.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, on the matter of abortion, sir, do you feel that this issue, which is so semi-religious and so emotional, is a fit subject for a political debate, political discussion?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think the American people expect candidates for office to duck any issues just because they are intense, with good people on both sides having different views. I think the American people ought to get an answer from Governor Carter and myself on this issue just like on any other issue.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what do you think of Mr. Carter's characterization of you as "timid" in one statement and as "a captain hiding in a state room" in another?

THE PRESIDENT: That brings up an interesting point. I understand that yesterday Senator Mondale was complaining because I was not campaigning enough, and on August 4 of 1976 Governor Carter was complaining because I was campaigning too much. I wish they would get their act together. And it just seems to me that the American people want me first to be President and do the job here in the best way possible, and I intend to do it and I will campaign at the proper time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in connection with that, if you find your campaign running in a dry gulch, won't you change your plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't expect the campaign on behalf of President Ford to run into a dry gulch. We are making good headway. I think the polls reflect it, and we expect to win.

QUESTION: Mr. President, sir, the reports of your campaign committee during the primaries indicate that approximately 100 Federal officials gave campaign contributions to the President Ford Committee, and some of them subsequently said they did so in response to solicitation letters from Mr. Mosbacher and other officials of the committee. Do you think it is proper for the President Ford Committee to keep those contributions, or should they be sent back?

THE PRESIDENT: I was not familiar with any solicitation of any Federal official on behalf of the President Ford Committee, and when I was shown that some individuals of this Administration had voluntarily given to the President Ford Committee I did not know that they had done so beforehand. So I am sure there was no pressure, certainly none from me.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, today, I believe, is the second anniversary of the pardon of Richard Nixon. I know you said in the past, under the same circumstances you would issue the pardon again. I wonder if you have any thoughts you would share with us about the impact the pardon will have on the election and how you plan to respond to any charges that are made?

THE PRESIDENT: If it is made a political issue, either subtly or directly, it is going to be very difficult to anticipate what the public reaction will be, but I made that judgment two years ago today on the basis of the circumstances at that time.

I thought it was in the national interest that I concentrate on the international problems which were serious and domestic problems which were critical. I felt at that time I should devote 100 percent of my time to the problems both at home and abroad. I think if the same circumstances prevailed today, I would do the same.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this question is in two parts. Has the Soviet Union contacted you personally or this Government with regard to the pilot who has defected and asked for political asylum, and, secondly, are you concerned that your decision to grant political asylum will injure progress in our relations with the Soviet Union specifically on SALT and matters of that kind?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not familiar with any inquiries by the Soviet Union. They may have but I am just not informed as to that.

Number two, we have decided to grant asylum if the Soviet pilot asks for it. This is a tradition in the United States and as long as he wants such asylum, he will be granted it in the United States.

I don't think that granting him asylum will interfere with our relations with the Soviet Union.

QUESTION: Mr. President, going back to the Kelley matter for a moment. Governor Carter said yesterday also that the FBI Director should be as pure as Caesar's wife. Do you agree with that statement, and in light of the allegations against Mr. Kelley, do you think he is?

THE PRESIDENT: On the basis of a thorough investigation by the Attorney General, an outstanding lawyer, and I think an outstanding Attorney General, he recommended that I take the action which I did which was to keep the FBI Director.

I have full faith in the analysis and the recommendations of the Attorney General, and therefore I think I made the right decision.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 1:05 P.M. EDT)

#37
9/30/76

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 37

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

11:50 A.M. EDT
September 30, 1976
Thursday

In the Oval Office
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you are well aware of all the stories of allegations concerning your Grand Rapids past and the campaign financing, I know, and that the records allegedly have been subpoenaed by a Special Prosecutor. So, this must be very disturbing, and I suppose you want it cleared up before the election.

I know you believe the Judiciary Committee covered it all, but can you say categorically that there has never been any misuse of your campaign funds when you ran for Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me say very emphatically that I strongly believe in the Special Prosecutor concept. I support it; the Administration supports the continuation of a Special Prosecutor. I was pleased when the Senate passed a version that included such a provision. I am disappointed that the House apparently is not going to do it.

I should add that I have full confidence in the integrity of Mr. Ruff in his responsibilities as the Special Prosecutor.

Number two, I also believe in the full integrity of the Department of Justice, and I am certain that they will do whatever they are required to under their responsibilities.

Let me add that nobody on my staff has any authority whatsoever to contact either the Special Prosecutor or the Department of Justice to in any way hinder or impede whatever investigations are going on.

MORE

What I know about the Kent County situation I have picked up in reading the newspapers or seeing on television and radio what has been reported.

I, therefore, am not familiar with the precise charges, whatever they may be. But, I can say with complete confidence that I am certain that when the investigation is completed, that I will be free of any allegations such as I have read about.

I would add this final comment: There is a saying that is prevalent in the law that "justice delayed is justice denied." I am certain that the people responsible for any investigation will live up to the high standards required in the Canon of Ethics for the legal profession, which does require that in any such investigations that they be full, complete and concluded as readily as possible.

QUESTION: Well, you don't know for certain whether there are charges or whether you are the target, or do you?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

QUESTION: Doesn't your curiosity--even if you made public the fact that you were going to ask, I don't think that would be undue pressure, would it?

THE PRESIDENT: We are trying to be so circumspect, so that we are not under any circumstances accused of any improprieties, that I have told members of my staff that under no circumstances should they make contact with either the Special Prosecutor or the Department of Justice.

QUESTION: Mr. President, don't you have the right under the current law to ask if you are the target of the Special Prosecutor's investigation and, if that is the case, why don't you want to know that, at least?

THE PRESIDENT: I can't tell you whether under the law I can or can't. But, even if we do have that right, I think an inquiry by me or somebody on my staff would undoubtedly be misconstrued, and I just don't want any such allegations being made by anybody.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could you clear up a matter that has been pending for some time and was referred to in this investigation--or at least it was referred to in a newspaper article the other day--that when you were in the House you used to go down here to the Seamen's Institute, 22nd Street or somewhere, like a lot of other House Members did of both parties, and read a little speech that they gave you to read at noon luncheons and then they would give you a nice little check, maybe they would give you an extra \$1,000 or \$500 because you were Majority Leader? I am sure this was probably done by a lot of other Congressmen, but was that true?

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THE PRESIDENT: Any time I make a speech, Sarah, I solicit from members of my staff--I did up in the House, and I asked any organization that I was speaking to to give me ideas on what they thought would be appropriate comments in speaking to that organization.

In the case of the meetings that you speak of, it was before the Joint Maritime Labor Organization -- that is not the right term -- but it is a combination of all the labor organizations that are involved in the maritime industry.

Yes, I asked them for suggestions as to what they thought would be appropriate for discussion before their group and they, along with the Executive Branch of the Government that had jurisdiction over shipbuilding or any aspects of the maritime industry--I also got recommendations from them, and this combination of ideas for a speech, people on my staff put together in a speech. But they were not the ones who wrote the speech that you are speaking of.

They submitted what they thought would be appropriate and we took their ideas with the suggestions from the staff committees on the House and Senate side, the Executive Department people, the labor organizations, from the maritime industry overall, and that combination of information went into whatever speeches I made. I think that is a very appropriate way to handle it.

QUESTION: Did they give you a check for this, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, and those checks were fully reported on my income tax returns. They were reported to any other authority that required it and all of that matter was looked into by the House and Senate committees at the time of my Vice Presidential hearing.

QUESTION: But if they had matters pending before Congress, did you think it was right to take that money when they had matters pending before the Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I was deeply interested in the new legislation that was before the House and the Senate to expand and upgrade our maritime industry. That was a group that likewise felt that way, and I think it was proper.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your golf outings or social occasions, or other occasions with Rod Markley of Ford Motor Company or U.S. Steel, did you discuss Government business with them either when you were a Member of the House, or Vice President, or President?

THE PRESIDENT: Not to my best recollection.

MORE

QUESTION: You never discussed business?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think in the headlines that have run for about the last 10 days and the fact that some of these potential allegations have not been resolved, that there has been any damaging effect on your campaign, or would there be if "justice delayed" means there is no resolution of this before November 2?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is vitally important that any aspects of either one of these matters be fully resolved as quickly as possible. I have no way of knowing what the impact is politically.

QUESTION: Mr. President, one of the issues raised is whether any of this campaign money was actually ever diverted to your personal use. Would you like to say flatly whether that was so or not?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know whether that is an allegation that is being investigated by the Special Prosecutor's Office, but I can say that there was never money given to me by the Kent County Republican Committee. The Kent County Republican Committee may have done some advertising on behalf of my candidacy or the candidacy of other Republican candidates running for public office. That is their function.

They, for example, always the last week or so would have a full-page ad with the Gubernatorial candidate, the Senatorial candidate, the Congressional candidates, plus some State legislative officers, and so I suppose they spent their money on that, which is a perfectly proper function of the Kent County Republican Finance Committee and county organizations. No money ever went to me personally.

QUESTION: Mr. President, does the timing of the Special Prosecutor's investigation seem strange to you, or do you question the motivation?

THE PRESIDENT: I would not under any circumstances question the motivation or the timing.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you holding this press conference because Jimmy Carter has accused you of keeping silent on these matters?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all.

QUESTION: Mr. President, your staff says they are having some trouble getting records of all these various golfing trips and what-not. Have you ever asked Mr. Whyte if he has records?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding Mr. Whyte issued a two- or three-page statement a week or 10 days ago which outlined the circumstances of the three trips up to Pine Valley and the two down to Disneyland. I understand he issued that.

QUESTION: I mean records of what it cost and who paid and that sort of thing.

THE PRESIDENT: I have no access to their records. They will have to answer that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said it is vitally important the matter be resolved as soon as possible. Is it your wish it be resolved before the election? It is vitally important so the voters can see the full story, or the true story.

THE PRESIDENT: It is more important to me personally that it be cleared up because I am very proud of my record of personal integrity and I think that is more important than any impact it might have on the election.

QUESTION: Mr. President, may I just ask you this question: Those Marine unions, the Seafarers and Marine Engineers, supported you down through the years. Then you vetoed the bill that they wanted. I forget the name of it, but I am sure you recall it. After that they shifted over to Jimmy Carter. Do you have any feeling that maybe somebody in the Carter camp may have made some allegation to the Special Prosecutor and that is what triggered this, or is there a political motivation in there somewhere?

THE PRESIDENT: Bob, I wouldn't make any allegations of that kind. I don't think, since I don't know -- I don't think I ought to make any comment.

QUESTION: Obviously the Special Prosecutor wouldn't open an investigation, I would think, on just the basis of rumors. Somebody had to make an allegation there.

THE PRESIDENT: What impresses me the most is a statement by a former Special Prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, who has said, as I understand it, publicly, that before he left the office of Special Prosecutor he looked into such matters and he came to the conclusion that there was no reason for action.

Now, that in no way challenges the right or the integrity of Mr. Ruff, but where any such charges came from, I would have no idea.

QUESTION: Let me just make one follow-up. If I understand it, Mr. Jaworski said he had investigated the Seafarers Union, and I think that was in relation to a \$100,000 contribution they made to Richard Nixon. As far as I know, he never said he looked into MEBA -- the Marine Engineers. Do you know in fact whether or not he did?

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THE PRESIDENT: No, I can't be that precise.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said that you instructed that your staff shouldn't make any contacts to the Attorney General or to the Prosecutor. Have there been any contacts made by any of these agencies to you so that you have any information at all either that this is going to be resolved quickly or any information at all?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no information whatsoever.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you have any information from people back in your old home district, the Fifth District, that may have contacted you, presumably old friends of yours?

THE PRESIDENT: I read the Grand Rapids Press, which is a good newspaper, and I read stories concerning this and quotations from people who were former county chairmen or presently county chairmen, so I know what they said. But, they haven't talked extensively about the investigation. I guess they felt that they had testified or made comments to whoever was investigating it, and they didn't really say very much.

QUESTION: But you haven't talked to any of them personally?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a number of Pentagon military officers have received disciplinary reprimands for accepting freebies, free weekends of hunting expeditions. If you think there is nothing improper about a Congressman accepting free golfing weekend, what distinction is there?

THE PRESIDENT: The House passed a resolution sometime in 1968, as I understand it, which says nothing of significance or substance should be received. I do not feel that there was any impropriety on my part or any violation of that regulation.

I am an avid golfer. Most of you know it. I enjoy the company of people while I am playing golf. Every person that has been involved in these allegations I have reciprocated with as far as they coming either to my golf club or coming to our home.

There has been, I would say, substantial reciprocity. Whatever the circumstances of our getting together, it has been in a proper way and in no way a violation, in my judgment, of any rule or ethical standard. These are close personal friends and have been for many years, and I have never accepted -- or I don't believe they have tendered -- any such things on the basis of seeking any special privilege or anything that was improper.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, on June 15, before the Southern Baptist Convention, you condemned very strongly what you call "situation ethics" and I was wondering why this golfing vacation wasn't really "situation ethics," when at that time you said the American people, particularly our young people, cannot be expected to take pride or even participate in a system of Government that is defiled and dishonored, whether in the White House or the halls of Congress.

My question is, do you feel that in view of what the White House has admitted you can adjust your own standards here?

THE PRESIDENT: I have said that I don't consider these infrequent weekends a violation of either the rules of the House or any ethical standards.

I explained that these were longstanding personal relationships, where there has been virtual reciprocity -- and I wouldn't have accepted if there had been any thought in my mind that it was improper or a violation of any code of ethics.

QUESTION: Isn't that "situation ethics" though?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think so.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to follow up on Fran Lewine's question earlier, she asked you if any of the funds had been diverted to personal use, and your answer was, sir, you had never received any funds from Kent County.

Are we to understand that as a "no", that you have never used any of these funds for personal use?

THE PRESIDENT: From the Kent County Republican Committee?

QUESTION: From any campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say any campaign funds for personal use.

QUESTION: Do you find these stories personally painful, someone questioning your integrity?

THE PRESIDENT: It naturally has some impact when I know that all of these things have been investigated by some 400 FBI agents and 5 to 6 Internal Revenue agents with my income taxes going back to 8 or 9 years, when I know I have been given a clean bill of health, not only by the FBI but the Internal Revenue Service, by Senate and House committees, an overwhelming vote in the House and Senate.

MORE

When I look at the investigation that was made of my personal life, the financial circumstances, probably more than anybody else in the history of this country, I know that there is no problem. So, I guess to some extent one is bothered a bit, but as long as my conscience is clear I have no real problem.

QUESTION: You brought up the matter of the income tax. It is proper, isn't it, if in case a person receives a gift of an airplane ticket or something of that sort, it has to be listed on their income tax as a gift, or does reciprocity cover that when you buy a ticket later?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not familiar with the details of that, but the IRS went into all of these matters. They have closed out my income tax returns for back 8 or 9 years. They had people go into these with minute detail so I --

QUESTION: What I am asking is, actually I am asking for your legal advice.

THE PRESIDENT: I am not here to give you any legal advice.

QUESTION: Mr. President, is this longstanding personal relationship, personal and friendship though it may be based on -- is nevertheless valuable to United States Steel and to the Ford Motor Company, much as the employers of other people who are friends of yours -- for example, John Byrnes, who represents a great many interests in this town on tax reform and -- perhaps coincidentally, perhaps you believe this -- your position is about like his on tax reform?

I asked you earlier whether you had discussed business during these social outings. Rod Markley said you and he discussed the Clean Air Act. I wonder, do you not see that it is to their benefit for you to have this personal relationship?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me modify what I said a moment before. In a casual way, of course we might informally talk about certain matters, but I happen to feel that they were not asking me and I was not asking them. The times I have played with Rod have been at Burning Tree where we are both members and both pay our own way. John Byrnes, I played golf with him because he is a friend of 28-plus years. I don't see anything improper at all.

MORE

QUESTION: Do you feel you can separate their business as lobbyists and their representation of their corporations as your personal friend?

THE PRESIDENT: As a matter of fact, some of their comments could be helpful in what the status is.

QUESTION: Mr. President, since that seems to be the issue that Carter is raising, though, he seems to be raising the old buddy system issue and saying, in fact, you can't.

What can you say to counter that? How can you?

THE PRESIDENT: Maybe he can't, but I can.

QUESTION: Mr. President, may I ask you, you now are aware that some of these expenses were actually paid by the companies and not by your friends. But you were paying, when you had them to your home, you were paying yourself, the taxpayers were not taking care of this. So, these companies in effect were financing some of this.

What is your thinking about why they wanted to do this, why they were willing to entertain you on these weekends?

THE PRESIDENT: I think you would have to ask the people who offered the invitation. These are personal friends, and I don't ask in advance why you want to pay my green fees. I think that is a matter for them on the basis of their own integrity.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have been through one debate. Have you got any thoughts on the second one as to a change in format, or anything you would like to do differently?

THE PRESIDENT: We are very satisfied with the format that was used in the first debate. I thought it went very well.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you look more worried than I have seen you in a long time.

THE PRESIDENT: Worried?

QUESTION: Yes. You haven't smiled in a long time. You look troubled, and I have known you for ten years. Does this bother you? Is this something that is going to hurt you badly in the campaign?

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THE PRESIDENT: I answered a moment ago I am more concerned about my personal reputation. But, I am not unhappy. I am just worried about getting over to the signing ceremony for one of these bill signings.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:13 P.M. CDT)



#38
10/14/76

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 38

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

7:31 P.M. EDT
October 14, 1976
Thursday

In Room 450
The Old Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. Will you please sit down.

I do have a brief opening statement.. When I was chosen to be Vice President, I underwent the most intensive scrutiny of any man who has ever been selected for public office in the United States. My past life, my qualifications, my beliefs all were put under a microscope and in full public view. Nonetheless, all of you here tonight -- and many in our listening audience -- are aware of allegations that came forth in recent weeks involving my past political campaigns.

As I have said on several occasions, these rumors were false. I am very pleased that this morning the Special Prosecutor has finally put this matter to rest once and for all.

I have told you before that I am deeply privileged to serve as the President of this great nation. But, one thing that means more to me than my desire for public office is my personal reputation for integrity.

Today's announcement by the Special Prosecutor reaffirms the original findings of my Vice Presidential confirmation hearings. I hope that today's announcement will also accomplish one other major task -- that it will elevate the Presidential campaign to a level befitting the American people and the American political tradition.

For too many days this campaign has been mired in questions that have little bearing upon the future of this nation. The people of this country deserve better than that. They deserve a campaign that focuses on the most serious issues of our time -- on the purposes of Government, on the heavy burdens of taxation, on the cost of living and on the quality of our lives and on the ways to keep America strong, at peace and free.

MORE

Governor Carter and I have profound differences of opinion on these matters. I hope that in the 20 days remaining in this campaign we can talk seriously and honestly about these differences so that on November 2 the American people can make a clear choice and give us, one of us, a mandate to govern wisely and well during the next four years.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will be glad to answer your questions.

Fran?

QUESTION: Mr. President, would you also like to set the record straight tonight on an issue that John Dean has raised?

Did you at any time use your influence with any Members of Congress or talk to lobbyist Richard Cook about blocking a 1972 Watergate break-in investigation by Wright Patman's House Banking Committee?

THE PRESIDENT: I have reviewed the testimony that I gave before both the House and the Senate committees and those questions were asked. I responded fully.

A majority of the Members of the House committee and the Senate committee, after full investigation, came to the conclusion that there was no substance to those allegations.

I do not believe they are any more pertinent today than they were then, and my record was fully cleared at that time.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the past several days you have made two major decisions, one to sell Israel compression bombs, sophisticated weaponry, even though their request had been hanging fire for many months. You also decided to give the wheat price support, the 50 percent boost, even though the Agriculture Department said the day before that there was no economic justification for these.

Can you state flatly that none of these decisions was designed to enhance you politically?

THE PRESIDENT: Categorically, those decisions were based on conditions I think justified fully the decisions that I made. In the case of the four items that were cleared for delivery to the Government of Israel, those items have been on the list for consideration. Those items have been analyzed by the various departments in our Government. And the net result was that I decided, after discussing the matter with my top advisers, that those items should be cleared for the Government of Israel.

QUESTION: On what justification do you give such weapons and why did you bypass the Pentagon and the State Department?

THE PRESIDENT: I made the decision, and that decision is mine --and they may have been a little disappointed that they did not have an opportunity to leak the decision beforehand--and I felt that it was a decision only for the Commander-in-Chief, and I made it as such, and based on recommendations that were made to me by responsible people, the top people, giving me advice in this regard.

On the other question regarding the increase in the loan rates, in May of 1975 I vetoed an agricultural bill on the basis that I thought it was not good legislation at that time. But I said at that time in the veto message that I would be very watchful to make certain that if conditions changed we would increase the loan rate.

In May of 1975, for example, the price of wheat was about \$3.35 a bushel. Recently, the price of wheat was about \$2.79 a bushel. There was a very severe drop. And in order to make certain that wheat will be marketed properly and the farmer will have an opportunity to market that wheat which he produced at our request of full production, and in order for the farmers, the wheat farmers, to have adequate financing to proceed with their fall planting of winter wheat, I decided that it was in the best interest of full production for the American farmer that those loan rates be increased. They were based on a commitment I made in May of 1975, and changed conditions today.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the course of the Watergate Prosecutor's investigation of your income taxes, your taxes were made public, leaked to the press at one point, and in those taxes, it showed at one point you took money from your political organization and used over \$1,000 for a family vacation to Vail and several hundred dollars for personal clothing.

I wonder if you would address the propriety of action like that.

THE PRESIDENT: I think you have to bear in mind, as I recall those initial payments, for airline tickets and for the others, were made out of what we call the Fifth District account, and within, I think it was a week, or two weeks at the most, I reimbursed that account fully in both cases.

QUESTION: In the case of reimbursements, the tax information also showed that your personal bank account, if it were, went down in the red something like \$3,000, but it was soon reimbursed, and there was a question left as to how you reimbursed that \$3,000.

THE PRESIDENT: That was my next paycheck. (Laughter)

I think a few people in this country have written checks and then waited until the end of the month and then mailed the checks -- maybe you haven't done it, but I suspect a few people have -- and we mailed those checks after we had the money in the bank account. But I wrote the checks before the end of the month. It is a perfectly legitimate thing and there was never an overdraft in my account. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been some questions a few weeks ago about your taking, accepting, golfing vacations and travel from lobbyists and corporations. It has been quite some time since these allegations were made. I wonder if you can clear this up tonight. Just how often, how many times, did you accept free travel and golfing vacations from lobbyists and corporations?

THE PRESIDENT: To the best of my recollection, the ones that came to light are the ones involved -- there might be one or two more, but I can't recollect the instances.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I may follow up on Frances Lewine's first question, I don't think you quite answered the question. The question is not about your testimony at the time specifically, it is about the new allegations from John Dean that, in fact, you did discuss six times with Mr. Cook the matter of blocking the investigation by the House of Watergate and at the time you said, at the time that you went through your investigation, you mentioned, you said you did not recollect such discussions. Do you now recollect discussions with Mr. Cook on that subject?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I will give you exactly the same answer I gave to the House Committee and the Senate Committee. That answer was satisfactory the House Committee by a vote of 29 to eight, and I think a unanimous vote in the Senate committee.

The matter was fully investigated by those two committees and I think that is a satisfactory answer. I am not going to pass judgment on what Mr. Dean now alleges.

QUESTION: Mr. President, would you oppose, on the Dean matter, would you oppose a review of White House tapes and investigation by the Special Prosecutor an investigation that has been called for by Congressman Conyers and Congresswoman Holtzman?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a decision for the Special Prosecutor to make. I have never, at any time, in the just previous investigations or at any other time, interfered with the judgment or the decisions of the Special Prosecutor, and I wouldn't in this case.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have been going up and down the country, most recently in New York and New Jersey, saying things are getting better, things have improved and there is a definite difference between you and your other candidate, Mr. Carter.

There is a 7.8 percent unemployment rate. The Commerce Department today announced that retail sales fell by 1.1 percent. The stock market took a nose dive. Mr. Friedman, a conservative economist, says nothing that either you or Mr. Carter offers will cause a change in the rise of Federal spending, and finally Mr. Greenspan -- your own advisor -- predicted today a continued 6 percent inflation rate.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me set the record --

QUESTION: I don't understand how things are getting better.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me set the record straight. There is a very distinct difference between Federal spending proposals by President Ford and those of Governor Carter. Governor Carter has endorsed, embraced, sponsored, 60-some new programs that will cost \$100 billion a year at a minimum and \$200 billion probably on an annual basis. So, there is a distinct difference between Governor Carter on the one hand and myself. He wants to spend more and I want to hold the lid on Federal spending.

Let's talk about the status of the economy. In the first quarter of this calendar year, the rate of growth of GNP was 9.2 percent. It fell in the second quarter to 4.5 percent. It looks like the third quarter will be in the range of about 4 percent.

I have checked with the responsible advisors to me in this area and they expect a resumption of the rate of growth of GNP in October, November and December of over 5 percent and probably closer to 6 percent, and they expect that same rate of growth in 1977.

We have had a pause, but we could not sustain the rate of growth of the first quarter of 1976, when it was 9.2 or .3. We are now coming out of the dip or the pause that we had, and I believe that all, or practically all, economists recognize that the economy is continuing to improve and will get better in this quarter and in 1977.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, in keeping the lid on Federal spending, are you willing to accept the continued physical and social deterioration of the big cities of this country? A Marshall plan sort of approach has been offered. Would you, if elected, move in that direction?

THE PRESIDENT: I would not embrace any spending program that is going to cost the Federal Treasury and the American taxpayers billions and billions and billions of dollars. We have good programs for the rehabilitation of our major metropolitan areas. I just signed a general revenue sharing bill. We fully fund the Community Development Act. We fully fund the mass transit legislation.

We have a number of very good programs that are in operation today, and about three months ago I appointed the Secretary of HUD, Carla Hills, to head a Cabinet Committee on Urban Development and Neighborhood Revitalization. That committee is working together very closely so that we get the full benefit out of all the Federal dollars now available to help our inner cities and major metropolitan areas.

I think we are doing a good job and to all of a sudden just throw money in doesn't make any sense because you are bound to have more deficits, more taxes and more inflation.

So, I think we ought to make the programs we have today work and they are working and will solve the problem.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, a review of your travel logs from this fall and last fall shows that for a comparable period last fall you spent exactly as much time on the road -- 15 days last fall -- when there was no campaign and no election than you have this fall when there is a hotly contested Presidential election.

Doesn't this lend a little bit of credence to Governor Carter's charge that you have been hiding in the White House for most of this campaign?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: Tom, didn't you see that wonderful picture of me standing on top of the limousine with the caption "Is He Hiding?" The truth is, we are campaigning when we feel that we can be away from the White House and not neglect the primary responsibilities that I have as President of the United States.

I think you are familiar with the vast number of bills that I have had to sign. We have done that. That is my prime responsibility, among other things. We do get out and campaign. We were in New York and New Jersey earlier this week. We are going to Iowa, Missouri and Illinois between now and Sunday.

We will be traveling when we can, but my prime responsibility is to stay in the White House and get the job done here, and I will do that and then we will campaign after that.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you account for, at this rather late stage in the campaign, so many voters are telling pollsters that they remain undecided and many more are saying that they may not bother to vote at all?

THE PRESIDENT: It is disturbing that there are these statements to the effect that voters are apathetic. I believe we have tried to do everything we possibly can to stimulate voter participation. I want a maximum vote in this election on November 2 and in every way I possibly can we are going to stimulate it between now and November 2.

I can't give you an answer as to why there is apathy. I am going to do what I can to overcome that apathy and, naturally, I hope to convince 51 percent of the people in enough States so that we get enough electoral votes so that we can continue the policies of trust, peace and growing prosperity in the United States.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think it is proper for a Member of Congress to accept a golfing vacation or golfing weekend trip, and would you, now that you are in the White House, accept such a trip?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not accepted such a trip since I have been Vice President or President. And when I was in the Congress I have done as I said in the limited number of instances that have been in the paper.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said that in your debate with Jimmy Carter, your statement on Eastern Europe demonstrated a certain lack of ability to think fast on your feet. Without intending to once again review the merits of that debate, how important, in your judgment, is it for a President to think fast on his feet to do his job properly?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is vitally important for a President to make the right decisions in the Oval Office, and I think I have made the right decisions in the Oval Office. I have admitted that in that particular debate I made a slip in that one instance, but I would like to compare that one slip with the documented instances that we found in Governor Carter's presentation a week ago when he made some 14 either misrepresentations or inaccurate statements.

MORE

And while we are on that subject, I would like to say that I feel very strongly that the attitude that he took on that occasion, where he said America was not strong, where he said the United States Government had tried to get us into another Vietnam in Angola, and where he said the United States had lost respect throughout the world.

I don't approve of any candidate for office slandering the good name of the United States. It discourages our allies and it encourages our adversaries.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, on the debates, two of them have happened and one is to come. Do you have any thoughts perhaps on changing the rules for the third debate, and also, do you feel impeded since you are President and know more than you can say in public?

THE PRESIDENT: About the only improvement I would make is to get Mr. Carter to answer the questions. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, could you tell us why it took you six days and four clarifications before you finally admitted that you had in fact made a mistake in the debate in your remarks on Eastern Europe?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it took some thoughtful analysis because, as someone may have noticed, there was a letter to the editor in the New York Times a day or two ago by a very prominent ethnic, a man by the name of Janovitz, as I recall, who said that my answer was the right one. But it all depends on how you analyze the answer.

But I wanted to be very clear to make certain that the Polish-Americans and other ethnics in this country knew that I knew that there are some 30 Soviet divisions in Poland and several of the other Eastern European countries.

On the other hand, I want to say very strongly that anybody who has been in Poland, for example, as I have in 1975, and seen the Polish people, the strong, courageous look in their face, the deep feeling that you get from talking with them, although they recognize that the Soviet Union has X number of divisions occupying their country, that freedom is in their heart and in their mind, and they are not going to be dominated over the long run by any outside power.

Now we concede for the time being the Soviet Union has that military power there, but we subscribe to the hopes and the aspirations of the courageous Polish people and their relatives here in the United States.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, if they tried to overthrow that power, would you look favorably on helping them in some way?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we should answer that question. I don't think it is going to happen. I don't think we should respond to that kind of a question in a press conference.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have had some harsh words for your opponent's performance in the second debate, and yet every public opinion survey that I have seen showed you lost that debate and it was one that was on foreign and defense affairs, which are supposed to be your strong suit.

Do you agree that you lost that second debate and, if so, why? Or, if you think you won it, why do you think that happened?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there is a poll that shows the conclusion you have just set forth. I don't necessarily agree with that, but there were some very specific answers that were given by people who were interrogated afterwards. If you will look at that list of special questions that were asked of people who responded, it showed that in those cases -- and I think they were the very fundamental ones on specific issues -- knowledge, firmness, strength -- that a majority of people thought I had prevailed.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Federal Power Commission has authorized the increase in the price of new natural gas. That is something you favored. The original estimate was that it would cost the American consumer \$1.3 billion a year. Now we are told that it may be as high or higher than \$3 billion a year. Do you think that price increase should be rolled back or should it stand?

THE PRESIDENT: The fundamental issue is, if you don't get a price increase you are not going to have any new natural gas. So, the question is, are you willing to pay for enough gas to heat our homes and to heat our factories so people will have jobs? We have to give an incentive to people to go out and find new natural gas sources, and if you don't give them that incentive, there won't be any heat for their homes or heat for their factories and will lose the jobs.

MORE

QUESTION: Are you willing to risk another jolt to the economy from this large price increase?

THE PRESIDENT: I think a bigger jolt would be to have the jobs lost and the houses cold.

QUESTION: Mr. President, earlier in your campaign you said you intended to stress positive themes. Yet, in your most recent campaign appearance you concentrated on attacking Governor Carter. Tonight you accused him of slandering the name of the United States.

Do you think you have done all you can to elevate the level of this campaign and can we expect you to continue the way you have been in the last week or so?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is very positive to talk about tax reductions, as I have recommended to the American people that we increase the personal exemption from \$750 to \$1,000. That is very positive and very affirmative, and certainly in contrast to what Mr. Carter wants, which is to increase taxes for people with a medium or middle income level, which is about \$14,000. That is a distinct difference.

I am on the affirmative side. He is on the negative side.

QUESTION: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Sarah? (Laughter)
You knew I would get around to you.

QUESTION: Thank you. When you were in Congress you filed an income tax return for those years saying that you had very little money left over. Like a lot of us, you have about \$5 left over for spending money, I believe.

I wonder if you had included your golf fees and your dues at Congressional and Burning Tree? I believe you belonged to both of them, didn't you, and they are very expensive. You must have been strapped for funds. Who was helping you pay those large golfing expenses? You golfed three to five times a week, I believe.

THE PRESIDENT: First, that is an inaccurate statement and you know it, Sarah. (Laughter) When you are the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives and on the job, you don't play golf three to five times a week. I am sorry you said that because you know that is not true.

Now, let me just say that I paid for those golfing dues or charges by check, and the committee and everybody else, the Internal Revenue Service, the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation, the FBI and now the Special Prosecutor have all looked into those in depth and in detail and they have given me a clean bill of health, and I thank them for it.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Washington Post had an article today which noted that Ford Motor Company paid no taxes last year, paid no taxes the year before. Do you think that is fair and what are you going to do about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it is proper to remind the American people that those tax laws which are on the statute books were written by the Democrats who controlled the Congress for the last 22 years. If they are wrong, it is the fault of the majority party in the Congress.

QUESTION: What are you doing to change that?

THE PRESIDENT: We have made recommendations to the Congress over the last year and a half for some modifications in the income tax legislation, but how that would affect that particular company I can't give you the answer.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in a recent speech -- I am afraid I don't recall where -- you cut a line from your text in which you said something about the campaign should not be just a quiz show to see who gets to live in the White House for the next four years. And I assume you stand by that advance text. Were you trying to suggest that the debates have not been as effective as they should have been, they have not kept up the level of the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: Ann, you know, you read the advance text. I hope you are listening when I speak. You know, on many occasions, I add a little here and I take something else out. Oftentimes, I don't get those texts until maybe a half, three-quarters of an hour before I make the speech. So, I make the judgment myself. Those are the recommendations of the speechwriters.

Now, I didn't think that was an appropriate thing to say and, therefore, I didn't include it in the text that I gave to the meeting that you referred to.

QUESTION: Let me put it this way: Do you think the debates have helped keep up the level of the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the debates have been very wholesome. I think they have been constructive. I was the one that initiated the challenge. I believe that they ought to be an institution in future Presidential campaigns. I really believe that. And for that reason, I didn't think that sentence in that prepared text which I deleted reflected my own views.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, thank you. A little while ago you gave us an idea of how you balance your family budget, you kite checks. (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, no, I don't. No, I don't. I have never been overdrawn, young lady.

QUESTION: The question is, then, how is it that you are able to live on from \$5 to \$13 a week in cash as has been reported by the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal in 1972?

THE PRESIDENT: I repeat that the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, the Joint Committee on Taxation, two committees in the House and in the Senate, and an overwhelming majority of the Members of the House and Senate, believed the testimony. They went back and checked every one of those income tax returns from 1973 back six years, and they gave me a clean bill of health. Now, it has been reinvestigated for the fourth time by the Special Prosecutor and he concurs with the previous investigations.

Those are the facts of life. I write checks.

Thank you all. Thank you very much.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 8:00 P.M. EDT)



39
10/20/76

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 39

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

2:00 P.M. EDT
October 20, 1976
Wednesday

In the East Room
The White House
Washington, D. C.

THE PRESIDENT: Won't you all sit down.

It is easier to get in the Rose Garden. I guess we had better go back to it. We just had a door knob break off. (Laughter)

QUESTION: That is a sign of the times.

THE PRESIDENT: You can't blame that on me.

Helen?

QUESTION: Mr. President, regardless of the allegations of influences at the time, and in view of the long national nightmare we went through, do you have any regrets, any remorse for the role that you played in helping to block the first investigation of one of the worst White House scandals in history? And I have a follow-up.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe what I did in working with the Republican Members of the House Committee on Banking and Currency was a blocking of an investigation of Watergate. I did that because the Republican Members of that committee specifically asked me to get them together.

Now what that committee would have done was, as I understood it, to investigate a very limited part of certain campaign activities. It didn't have any intention or have any program to do anything beyond that.

So, what I did was at the request of the responsible people on the Banking and Currency Committee and, under the circumstances, as I knew it then, I think I would do exactly the same thing.

QUESTION: Well, Mr. President, there also is a widespread speculation that you may pardon Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman as all part of the same package. Is there any validity to that?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: There is absolutely no validity whatsoever to that rumor. In fact, you are the first one that has raised it with me, so I want you to know it and I want everybody else to know it. There is no credence whatsoever to it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the past week, two top men in your Administration -- FBI Chief Clarence Brown, and General George -- I mean Clarence Kelley and General George Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- have come under criticism for their comments involving curbs on the press and aid to Israel.

I want to know, have you made any comment on this? What is your view of this incident, and if you are elected would you keep these two men in these responsible jobs?

THE PRESIDENT: I am glad that the Counsel of the White House, through the Attorney General, did stop what I understood was to be a speech by Clarence Kelley. From what I know about the speech, I think it would have been ill-advised and would not reflect the views of President Ford in his relationship with the press.

Now, General Brown had an interview six or eight months ago. It was released at a time when I am certain that General Brown didn't anticipate it would be released, and it was released in part and not in whole.

General Brown, after consulting with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, did appear before the press, both of them, and explained the entire context of the interview. The total interview would lead any reasonable person to a different interpretation than the excerpts that were taken from it and were released to the press.

I happen to believe General Brown and I have reviewed the whole text of that interview myself. Some of those statements were impudent (imprudent) and were ill-advised, and I certainly don't believe that General Brown, in that position, ought to make those kind of comments in several instances, but I also don't believe it was fair in the prospective or released text that certain excerpts should be taken, and several of them taken out of context.

Now General Brown was just recommended by me and he was confirmed by the Senate for a two-year term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I would expect him to stay. He has a superb military record -- 35 years of devoted service in wartime -- and I think he has been a fine Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But he made one or two ill-advised statements and I hope and trust that he won't do it again.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, you would keep both him and Mr. Kelly in their jobs?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, because I think Clarence Kelly has taken a very serious situation in the F.B.I. I think he straightened it out and I think he is a person that all of us can have trust in as far as the job as the job as the Director of the F.B.I.

QUESTION: Mr. President, at your last news conference you said that the campaign to date had been, quoting you, "mired in questions that have little bearing on the future of this nation," and that you would try to elevate the level of the discourse from there on. Subsequently you seemed to be preoccupied with suggesting that Mr. Carter was a dissembler and again to use your words, "an individual who waivers, wanders, wiggles and waffles," and your campaign organization has sponsored reproductions in advertisements of the front cover of Playboy Magazine. Is that what you meant by elevating the level of the discourse?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is graphic and accurate to say that Mr. Carter does waiver, wander, wiggle and waffle. There are plenty of illustrations, as a matter of fact, that that is true. Now the language is a little graphic, but there is nothing personal about it. I didn't attack his integrity or anything close to that. Now Mr. Carter did have an interview in Playboy Magazine. I haven't looked at the magazine. I am sure there are about seven million Americans, I understand, who will look at it and will probably read the article. (Laughter) But I reiterate what I said once before, I turned down an invitation by Playboy Magazine to have an interview such as Mr. Carter did. These are all factual statements either by myself or factual statements as to an interview that he had in a certain magazine.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Carter yesterday said that if he was elected he would end the Arab boycott. I wonder if you consider this a legitimate matter --

THE PRESIDENT: You mean the Arab oil embargo or the Arab boycott?

QUESTION: The Arab boycott on Israel -- I misspoke. I wonder if you consider this a legitimate objective and if you would like to do the same thing?

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THE PRESIDENT: The Ford Administration is the only Administration since 1952 when the Arab boycott went into effect that has done anything in the Executive Branch of the government. Now Mr. Carter says that he would end it -- very short sentence. I resent the inference of that. The Arab boycott was initiated in 1952. In effect he is saying that President Eisenhower didn't do anything, that President Kennedy didn't do anything about it, that President Johnson didn't do anything about it, President Nixon didn't do anything about it, and he infers I haven't, and of course he is inaccurate there. But I resent that he is challenging those other four Presidents-- Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon -- because I know they opposed the Arab boycott just as much as I do and as much as Mr. Carter does. And I wonder if anybody can be so naive as to say in one sentence that he is going to do something that four other outstanding individuals didn't do even though they opposed the same thing, and I think it is ridiculous for him to make that kind of an allegation.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, since your nomination, your decision to choose Robert Dole as Vice President has been one of the most important ones you have had to make. His record both during the campaign and in Congress has been one of extreme partisanship; for example, in his support of nominations to the Supreme Court of Haynesworth and Carswell and his actions on the Watergate investigation.

What can you point to in his career that shows that he has that judgment, that initiative and that leadership that Americans are looking for in a Vice President and potential President?

THE PRESIDENT: He served in the House of Representatives and in the United States Senate, I think, for 16 years. I believe that his record as a Representative and as a Senator is an excellent record. In fact, it is a record of longer tenure than Senator Mondale.

So, on that basis, he is better qualified than Senator Mondale. They have different philosophies. Mondale is a very liberal Senator, and Dole is a moderate to conservative, but I think Bob Dole, on the basis of his record of service in the Congress, is fully qualified to be Vice President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I could go back to that Playboy interview for a moment, sir, if you haven't read it or seen Playboy, why do you think it is fair to criticize Mr. Carter about it.

THE PRESIDENT: I have read the article. I haven't read it in the magazine.

QUESTION: Well, if I could follow up on that, when you criticise him, is it because you specifically disagreed with some things that he said in that, or is it because of the political benefit that a person might be expected to get in criticizing Playboy Magazine?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know why Mr. Carter agreed to the interview. That is not for me to judge. That was a decision made by him. I don't think a President of the United States ought to have an interview in a magazine that has that format. It is a personal conviction.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a moment ago, when you were talking about the Arab boycott, you were accusing Mr. Carter of inferring that previous Presidents had done nothing about it, but you prefaced that with a statement that the Ford Administration is the only one that had done anything about it since 1952. Aren't you and Mr. Carter making the same accusations.

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THE PRESIDENT: I have done it. He says that he is going to end it. I think the affirmative action that I have taken -- and it has been proven, I think, helpful, because of what has transpired since I think it was October 7 when the actual order was issued that would force companies who had participated to have their names revealed -- I think this will be a big deterrent. I hope it will.

I am against that Arab boycott, but I repeat, I am the first President that has taken any affirmative action, and I think the way that Mr. Carter stated it was a reflection on previous Presidents who I know felt as strongly as he does that an Arab boycott is contrary to the philosophy that we as Americans have.

QUESTION: If you are saying that previous Presidents did nothing about it, aren't you, in effect, making the same accusation against him?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I said he said they had not done anything about it.

QUESTION: You have said the Ford Administration is the only one that has done anything.

THE PRESIDENT: Anything that is required that companies put their name on the line that they participated or had received information, that is correct.

QUESTION: During your last debate with Jimmy Carter, Mr. Carter stated that if there was another Arab oil boycott and he was President of the United States, he would break that boycott by countering it with a boycott of our own.

Mr. President, do you think this is a realistic possibility? Could the United States break down an Arab boycott or embargo by penalizing them by refusing to sell materials to them and, secondly, even if it is realistic, would it be in the best interest of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: My answer would be that I would not tolerate an Arab oil embargo, but I add very quickly in the current atmosphere, because of the leadership of the Ford Administration, you aren't going to have an Arab oil embargo. Let me tell you why.

In 1973, we had the Yom Kippur War. That was settled. We had the Sinai I agreement, followed by the Sinai II agreement.

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This Administration in the Sinai II agreement was able to expand the peace effort in the Middle East because the Arab nations on the one hand and Israel on the other trust the Ford Administration.

You won't find among Arab nations today the same attitude that prevailed at the time of the Yom Kippur War. You won't find the possibilities of another Middle East war today that you had in 1973. So, the probabilities of an Arab oil embargo are virtually nil because of the leadership of this Administration.

Now, furthermore, I do not agree with the proposed recommendation of Mr. Carter, if there was one. He said he would cut off food, he would cut off trade, he would cut off military arms.

I think we can avoid any Arab oil embargo and not have to reresort to cutting off food that American farmers have produced and sell abroad in order to help our economy here at home.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, many people are saying that the candidates are showing no vision. What is your vision for America?

THE PRESIDENT: My vision for America, first, is that we shall be a Nation at peace as we are today. My vision of the next four years is also that we will have a better quality of life; that we will have our younger people having a better opportunity for quality education; that every person who wants a job will have a job; that the best health care will be available, at prices people can afford; that we will have a record of safety and security in the streets of America for those 215 million Americans who ought to be able to walk in their community or any other part of the country without the threat of crime. My vision would also include an opportunity for greater recreation capability.

In other words, peace, a job, better health, better education, no crime or control over the criminal situation, and a better opportunity for recreation -- those are the visions that I have.

QUESTION: Many people, though, are asking whether you truly have a vision for the underprivileged, whether you really care.

THE PRESIDENT: When you say a job for everybody who wants to work, I think that certainly indicates that you have a deep concern for the people who are disadvantaged, unemployed.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I wonder if you have made any wagers with your family, friends or staff about what the popular and electoral vote will be on November 2?

THE PRESIDENT: I haven't made any wagers with my family as to the outcome, but all of us -- my four children, Betty and myself -- believe that when the votes are finally counted, the American people will want four years of the progress we made in the last two, and a better America during that period. But there are no wagers as to whether we are going to win or not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the comment by Secretary Butz that led to his resignation was made in response to a question about the commitment of this Administration to blacks and other minorities. What is the commitment of this Administration? What plans do you have to expand the entering into the society of black and other minorities in the next four years if you are elected?

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THE PRESIDENT: We have a number of good programs at the present time. We certainly will continue to enforce the Civil Rights Act that was passed when I was in Congress, which I supported. We will enforce it as to the right to vote, as to housing, as to the opportunity for minority business. We will cover the spectrum to make sure that any minority -- not just blacks but any minority -- Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, generally, blacks -- all minorities in this country ought to be treated equitably and fairly, and they will under the existing laws as they have been for the last two-plus years.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Barry Goldwater has said that he agrees with General Brown in the sense that Israel is a military burden of the United States and that we may deplete our own armor to supply Israel and we may give Israel too many arms, too much arms. Is Israel a burden in your opinion and will we deplete our own arms in giving Israel arms.

THE PRESIDENT: That is a very good question and I would like to expand a bit in my response, if I might. The United States is dedicated to the security and survival of Israel. The three million Israelis are a democratic state in an area where democracy doesn't flourish. We have many, many good firm fine ties with the people and with the Government of Israel. I want that to be understood very clearly.

Now you have to look at the broad picture when you look at the United States and Israel's military circumstances. At the time of the Yom Kippur War, the United States came immediately to the aid of Israel with substantial military hardware and military equipment. We drew down from our reserves in Western Europe, in the NATO forces, U.S. hardware that was sent to Israel. Now that was not an irreparable situation in NATO because in the interim, from 1973, we have virtually made up that draw-down but for a period of time one could say that the immediate needs of Israel in a crisis were a burden to the United States.

On the other hand, since I have been President, from August 9, 1974 to the present time, in order to make Israel strong militarily the Ford Administration has either granted or sold about \$2-1/2 billion worth of military equipment to the state of Israel. The net result is today Israel is stronger militarily than it was prior to the Yom Kippur War because of the support of the Ford Administration.

So today Israel is not a burden militarily to the United States because of the forthright action of the Ford Administration, and you have to take the comments that have been made in the proper context. Israel is a strong ally who doesn't want U.S. troops to be a participant in any future military engagement there because Israel is strong and the Ford Administration has contributed significantly to making them strong. But in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, some emergency actions had to be taken.

Now we have overcome it. Israel is strong and they are a good ally and we are dedicated to their security and survival.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been a good deal of discussion, sir, and concern that the issues discussed in the campaign have been too narrow, and you and Mr. Carter haven't discussed a broad enough range of issues, and that frankly very often during the debates you have been rattling off pre-rehearsed answers to questions regardless of the questions.

How about that large question, and would you have any particular initiative for America's troubled cities in another term.

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THE PRESIDENT: Let me speak very forthrightly. I can't speak for Mr. Carter, but we don't anticipate what those questions are going to be from members of the press. We answer them based on our knowledge or our experience. In my case, they are not pre-rehearsed, and any allegations to that effect just aren't accurate.

Now let me say this about the Ford Administration and its reference to the needs and requirements of our major metropolitan areas. The Ford Administration, with general revenue sharing, with the Community Development Act, Mass Transit Act, with the LEAA program, and a number of other programs, has given more money to major metropolitan cities, to our big cities in this country than any previous Administration. That is a fact.

Now the net result is sometimes those programs have overlapped. And so about five months ago I asked Secretary of HUD, Carla Hills, to head a Cabinet-level committee called the Committee on Urban Development and Neighborhood Revitalization, and some time, I hope -- maybe this week or next -- we will have that Cabinet committee's recommendations so we could better utilize the vast amounts of money, the billions and billions of dollars that have gone from the Federal Treasury to our cities, so that they will be better utilized, and I am looking forward to that report. I am looking forward to having it published because I am told that it has some very good recommendations of how we can better utilize what we are making available.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in addition to doing what you did in connection with the Patman inquiry in 1972, at the request of the Republican Members of the Patman Committee, were you also asked by Mr. Nixon or anyone acting for him on the White House Staff to do that?

THE PRESIDENT: As I recall my testimony, John, before one -- maybe both committees -- I said I had never been contacted by President Nixon, by Mr. Ehrlichman, by Mr. Haldeman or by Mr. Dean, and I said that I had virtually daily contact with Mr. Timmons, who was the head of the Legislative Liaison Office. But, to the best of my recollection, neither he nor anybody in his office asked me to take a hand in the Patman action or the committee action. That was my testimony in 1973; it is my testimony, or my answer to your question today.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you stated that Governor Carter once advocated a \$15 billion cut in the defense budget. He said that is not so, that he only wants to cut \$5 billion or \$7 billion out and he wants to take it all out of waste.

I would like to know, why don't you join Governor Carter in coming out in favor of cutting that much waste out of the defense budget?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the record is clear that on two occasions Governor Carter did say -- once in Savannah, Georgia and once in Los Angeles -- and he was quoted in reputable newspapers -- that he would cut the defense budget \$15 billion.

Now, it is true, according to what he says today, that he has gone from a \$15 billion cut down to a \$5 to \$7 billion cut. I am glad to see that as he gets better educated in these matters that he understands that you can't do that to the Defense Department and be strong enough to meet the challenges of the Soviet Union or anybody else.

All right. The Ford Administration in January of this year recommended to the Congress the military budget that called for spending what we call obligational authority of about \$112.5 billion. We said that you could keep the military strong and keep the peace as we have it with that kind of a military budget, providing the Congress would take certain other actions to improve the efficiency and achieve economies in the Defense Department, and I think those proposed economies totaled about \$4 billion.

Now, the Congress, when they got all through, only approved about \$1 billion and a half to \$2 billion of those economies that the Ford Administration recommended for the Department of Defense. So, we were on record in January for some very specific economies and improved efficiencies in the Defense Department.

The net result is Congress wouldn't go along with it. They wouldn't change the laws. But, we are going to send up a budget in January for the Defense Department that will provide for the necessary funding to keep the peace, but we will also send up the kind of economy and efficiency recommendations that we made last January.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much.

How do you like the afternoon shows? (Laughter)

END

(AT 2:30 P.M. EDT)