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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF

ROBERT BLACKWELL
MAYOR, HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN
TIMOTHY JENKINS
CHAIRMAN, THE MATCH INSTITUTION
AND

STAN SCOTT
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

1:00 P.M. EDT

MR. SPEAKES: This morning, as you know, the President met with the black mayors and black Republican leaders in the Cabinet Room.

We have with us today Mayor Robert Blackwell of Highland Park, Michigan, and Timothy Jenkins, an attorney from Washington, D.C.

To introduce them and tell you something about the meeting is Special Assistant to the President Stan Scott.

MR. SCOTT: Good afternoon.

The meeting ran a little longer than I thought. We met for approximately 50 minutes with the President today, discussing wide-ranging topics, including Republican politics as it relates to broadening the base of the Republican Party. We also had the opportunity to dialogue with some of the top officials here at the White House, including Counsellors Jack Marsh, Anne Armstrong and Robert Hartmann, along with the Chairwoman-designate of the Republican National Committee, Mary Louise Smith.

The meeting, as I said earlier, with the President lasted about 50 minutes. The President indicated to the some 30 participants in this meeting, a cross-section of Republicans from various States representing various Republican organizations in the country, first of all that they had a friend in the White House.

Secondly, the President told the participants that he is an advocate of the two-party system. He will work to broaden the base of the Republican Party with blacks and other minority involvement.

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We discussed grass roots politics. We also formed various committees to work with my office in terms of providing input to the President, to the Counsellors, to the Domestic Council, in terms of some of the outstanding problems of the day: unemployment, economics, inflation, and personnel as it relates to minority involvement in the Federal establishment.

The meeting with the group that we brought in convened at 9:30 in the Cabinet Room. The President came in an hour later and remained with us for 50 minutes. Our meeting adjourned at approximately 12 noon, and we reconvened over in the Old Executive Office Building in the conference room over there to get the nuts and bolts and some marching orders on what we wanted to do to accomplish our goals in this instance.

I think that is a general overview, and we will be more than happy to entertain any questions you might have.

Mr. Mayor and Mr. Jenkins, why don't you come up and join me here?

Q Did the President say anything about naming blacks to positions in the Cabinet? Does he have any intentions to?

MR. SCOTT: This matter did come up, along with other matters in terms of blacks and other minorities playing meaningful roles in his Administration, and he assured the participants that their recommendations -- they all left with me position papers, incidentally -- he assured the participants that all their recommendations would be considered at the highest level.

Q Did he say there would be a black in his Cabinet or not?

MR. SCOTT: No, there was no definite commitment on a black in the Cabinet, just as there was no definite commitment on a black out in one of the departments or agencies. He did tell the group that they had a friend in the White House and that he would be evenhanded and he would do what has to be done to provide involvement for black minorities and other minorities in this country.

MR. BLACKWELL: Gentlemen, and ladies, I would like to add that what we pointed out to the President this morning was the very unique political quirk in our system whereby most of the prominent elected blacks are Democrats. It has appeared to the country that he has been dealing with that area.

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So, this convening today seems to be an answer to the meeting with the Black Congressional Caucus and through the good offices of Mr. Stan Scott, the meeting was arranged.

The President listened to us very attentively and he told us that he felt very strongly that since inflation is the number one issue in this country, he also thought that it would affect poor people and black people particularly harsh and that he would wish that we would help develop these position papers and supply that information through subcommittees, through Mr. Scott and his office.

Q Mr. Mayor, did the group request the meeting or did the President, through Stan, request the meeting?

MR. BLACKWELL: I did not request the meeting. I had an invitation last Saturday, and I was delighted to get it. I don't know how it was arranged.

MR. SCOTT: The President through any office.

Q Mr. Blackwell, how can you go about electing Republicans in a place like Highland Park, Michigan?

MR. BLACKWELL: Very easily. We produce the programs and we provide the services for the community. My community is approximately 78 percent Democratic. I have been in office now since 1968, and I have had very strong support from Washington in Federal programming. I could say to you very candidly that with the Better Communities Act, the small community of Highland Park, Michigan, will receive one of the largest Federal grants of any city in the Nation; that is, to carry on social and physical programs.

Q Do you see a time when Detroit and Highland Park will be Republican cities?

MR. BLACKWELL: Let's put it this way: The local governments in Highland Park and Detroit, both, are nonpartisan.

MR. JENKINS: I think it is important for you to appreciate that a number of us who were there wanted to have the record clear that we who have had some identity with the Republican Party shared in a nonpartisan basis a number of the issues for the advancement of black people that had been previously expressed by the Black Caucus and others.

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We welcomed the opportunity to speak with the President and have him know in no uncertain terms that the kind of interests we had in economic questions, employment questions and also the influence and wielding of public authority for black people was really a non-partisan issue, just as international questions are nonpartisan.

So, we think the advancement of disadvantaged people is a nonpartisan issue, and we wanted to dispell any lack of clarity about our support and commitment to his representative, Mr. Stanley Scott, as a person whom we have confidence in and believe will adequately put forward the issues that affect black people.

The President was receptive. He indicated that he would welcome on future occasions the reports that are generated by this collection of individuals. We have since agreed to subdivide into several committees concerned with the matter of positions and appointments, concerned with the matter of employment, concerned with the matter of economics in an inflationary period.

He welcomed us and indicated through his Counsellor, Mr. Hartmann, that the reports and advice from this committee will receive review at the highest levels of policy making.

Q Did any of you give the President your opinion of his pardon of former President Nixon, or try to reflect for him the feelings within the communities that you represent as to his action on that matter?

MR. SCOTT: I might respond by saying that while that issue did not come up in the conversation, one of the attendees did pass on to the President a newspaper column that was done in one of the minority publications out of New York that was favorable to the President's decision.

Q Was that the only thing that came up in connection with the pardon?

MR. SCOTT: That is correct, Bill.

Q In the spirit of humanitarianism and nonpartisanship to which the previous gentleman just spoke, was there any mention made of the conviction and sentencing to the electric chair of this Marcus Chenault yesterday in Atlanta for the murder of Mrs. Martin Luther King?

To all appearances, this man is psychologically sick, and it would appear to be a stigma on the United States if this man were really electrically hung.

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MR. SCOTT: While I am not familiar with all the details of the trial, that matter did not come up in the discussion.

MR. BLACKWELL: Let me make a comment. I seem to get the feeling really -- and it gets a little boring to me from the standpoint of the media -- that the most important thing is the fact that the President pardoned the ex-President.

Well, it just so happens that back in Highland Park and Detroit we have people starving, and are affected by inflation and crime, and all the serious problems.

The President has already made that pardon, that is done, and I think we need to be about the business of running this country, and I am not about to pardon all the felons who have committed crimes because the President has pardoned somebody else.

Q Let me clarify this. My question was in connection with --

MR. BLACKWELL: The answer would be no, as far as I am concerned, he shouldn't be pardoned.

Q This particular case has nothing to do with any previous pardon, or anything else. There is no connection at all with my question.

Q Did the President give any indication whether he had changed his view of busing since he became President? He has been a very strong foe of busing.

MR. SCOTT: No, busing did not enter into the discussions this morning.

MR. BLACKWELL: Let me say on this point, I have known Jerry Ford for quite a long time. In fact, when I first ran for political office, in 1960, I had changed from a Democrat to run on the Republican ticket and Mr. Ford had to clear my thinking on a lot of issues because I still had the other orientation.

I certainly think that this President, in my opinion, doesn't have a prejudiced bone in his body, and he has a tremendous compassion for the little man. I think like Mr. Truman and like Mr. Johnson, who never voted for a civil rights issue, who never supported an issue on labor, when Mr. Johnson did not represent the narrow community of Texas, he became a President of all the people, and did one of the finest jobs in the field of civil rights for the black community. I think Mr. Ford will excel that record.

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Q Are you against busing?

MR. BLACKWELL: Yes.

MR. JENKINS: Can I be clear on the question that was raised? We talked about the educational needs of the black people in an affirmative way across the board, and we also spoke about the needs for full compliance on all of these new devices of new Federalism, block grants, revenue sharing and the importance of important protections and mechanisms for the enforcement of civil rights.

We gave the President to understand in no uncertain terms that while we have seen an initiative to develop many of these programs along liberalized and progressive lines, we also shared with the rest of the black community grave concerns about the adequacy of enforcement and protection of minorities in these programs.

We expressed our views that we did not wish to see local initiative become another form of states rights. The President assured us that the full enforcement of the law will be made and adequate resources applied to the question of enforcement throughout the new Federalism initiatives.

Q Were all the participants in today's meeting members of the Republican Party?

MR. SCOTT: That is right. I think we had Mayor Ford, who happens to be a Democrat, but supportive of President Ford. Johnny Ford of Tuskegee, Alabama.

Q Mayor Blackwell, I am wondering, you seem somewhat incensed at the question on pardon and that there are more important issues. Do we have the wrong opinion here in Washington that the pardon of the former President is certainly not any big issue out where you live, and out in the country?

MR. BLACKWELL: I think that you carry on a conversation piece, and if it is on the news tubes every day and if the Today Show interviews two or three people every day about the issue, then it is on people's minds.

I submit the issue is not that great. It is not that important to the country because the deed has been done.

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Q Do you approve of it?

MR. BLACKWELL: I did not approve of him pardoning the ex-President, no.

Q Why not?

MR. BLACKWELL: I had very serious concerns. In fact, I spent a sleepless night thinking about it, but it is done.

Q What are the political effects of this on the President and on the Republican Party?

MR. BLACKWELL: That is very difficult to measure, in my opinion. I don't know what effect it will have. I would hope that the Congress would be about the business of confirming Governor Rockefeller so that we could be about the business of running the country.

Q I gather you were miffed that the President saw the Black Caucus and you had not gotten an invitation so you solicited, or somebody solicited, an invitation?

MR. BLACKWELL: I assure you that is not true. We respect the Black Caucus and we recognize that they have an awesome responsibility. I don't think, for my part, it has any bearing on it.

MR. JENKINS: It is indeed, because we wanted the President to understand that the Black Caucus does represent interest on the part of the black community regardless of their Democratic affiliation, that we wanted to meet with him and have that clarification made.

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Q Then you asked for the meeting and not the President?

MR. SCOTT: No, the President asked for the meeting through my office, and we went ahead to plan it. This is the first, incidentally, in a series of meetings that we will be conducting to provide input to the Administration from, in this particular instance, the black minority sector.

Q Was there a consensus now that the main problem facing the black community is the economy?

MR. SCOTT: That is correct, Helen.

I think in summary the major aspect of this quorum today was first of all an acknowledgement that the black vote in this country is not as effective as it should or could be, and that is because we do not have an effective two-party vote within the black ranks.

What I am saying is the fact is a candidate can announce for office today and if he happens to be a Democrat, before he makes his first campaign speech, he knows that he has 60 or 70 percent of that black vote in his hip pocket.

We all know that that is not healthy. So what we are working toward is to try to broaden the base of the Republican Party and broaden the scope of the black vote so that we can become more effective within our own system.

Q How do you intend to do that?

MR. SCOTT: We have discussed many ways and that is one of the reasons that we formed the three subcommittees that will be working with my office in terms of personnel, in terms of minority input, and in terms of employment opportunity in the Federal establishment, in terms of politics.

We formed a subcommittee on politics to provide greater input at the Republican National Committee. We also formed a subcommittee on economics because, as we view it today, the major problems, the major goals for blacks and other minorities in this country, is to achieve some economic status, some political clout in this country. That is what it is all about, and every ethnic group that has been able to make it into the so-called American melting pot has been able to do it by climbing the economic route, and we submit that it is no different for the black minorities in this country.

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Q Mr. Blackwell, you were talking about Detroit being a non-partisan city and your city being a non-partisan city. Why do you feel that way?

MR. BLACKWELL: I didn't mean it that way. I didn't have a good answer for you.

Q I would like to get back to that question again. Do you ever see a time when the Republican Party can be a party of blacks?

MR. BLACKWELL: I really do. I think this point was touched on by Mr. Marsh who happened to have been a Democrat from Virginia, a Democratic Congressman who now works on the President's staff.

He mentioned the fact that it occurred to him that it was odd, since Lincoln was the doer and all blacks were really Republicans in the early 1900's, and certainly there were no Republicans in the South except blacks. And we pointed out that if the President continues his policy and can produce the programs, he can get the black support, because that is where it is.

MR. JENKINS: One of the important things at this meeting was that we had the Chairperson-Designate for the Republican National Committee present. We wanted Miss Smith to know in no uncertain terms that the blacks are not wedded to any political party, that blacks, like other people, vote their self interest, and it was incumbent upon the Republican Party to make clear that the election of black representatives in the Republican structure was also consistent with their best interests.

So we believe that we had a double mandate here today to talk not only to the administrative structure and have them understand what blacks demand, but also have the party structure appreciate what blacks require in order to give greater support to their political interests.

Q The original question was, in the Republican Party is there an empathy for black needs?

MR. JENKINS: I think the critical thing is there are positions which are reiterated at platform time which, of course, leave the year after the election for implementation.

I think there are supported positions in the platform structure or the philosophical positions of the Party which need further implementation on the practical side.

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So I think we were here today to speak to the practical issues of black people's interest.

Q Let me get you to address yourselves to the question of pardon that the Mayor has already dealt with. Specifically, do you find blacks and others resenting the pardon as establishing or giving credence to the theory that this is a rule of men as opposed to a rule of law?

MR. JENKINS: I think the issue of pardon has a different impact in the white and black community. As far as blacks are concerned, we have many questions about the administration of the criminal justice system and, indeed, to the extent that this expresses an interest on the part of the Administration to reexamine the use of the criminal justice system in a more humane way, we view that this would be a liberalizing effect which blacks stand outside of and watch with interest.

We have a number of people who we would advocate for the same kind of consideration. So I think that we were focused on the delivery system of a broad range of interests that didn't touch or particularly concern the pardon, but implicit in the issues that we raised was the theme of expanding humanity and the principle of clemency to all black people and disadvantaged people.

Q Are you suggesting, sir, that there are some of the black activists that have been in the court annals recently that might be due the same consideration that Mr. Nixon got?

I mean, you said several people. Could you name some?

MR. JENKINS: This issue was not discussed. Our interest was not to come here to talk about pardons. Our interest was to talk about the broad Federal programs that affect and concern black people, and that is why we came and those issues were the issues we addressed.

I am saying, however, that in the arena of the criminal justice system, there is a broad range of room for improvement. And certainly in our position papers that we submitted and in the position papers that we will subsequently define, we will raise those questions.

Q I think we are asking these questions for a dual purpose, not only because pardon is a big issue, but because the black community has always had a special concern for the idea of two standards of justice.

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Now this pardon has been criticized in many areas as an example of that. You suggested there might be some black individuals who would rate the same kind of consideration.

I am asking you as an individual, not as a representative of this group this morning, what individuals you had in mind?

MR. JENKINS: If we went through the annals of criminal convictions, we would find that in the first instance a tremendous number of blacks are charged with crimes at a disproportionate rate than they would have been charged had they been white.

Indeed that is true not only at the Federal level but at the State level and the municipal level. Indeed if we wanted to make a proposition, we would have innumerable cases that should be reviewed for the purpose of pardoning because a number of those cases have been unjustly decided.

Q Did you favor the pardon of President Nixon, personally?

MR. JENKINS: Personally, I did not.

Q Mr. Jenkins, do you agree with Mayor Blackwell that it is the media that has blown the pardon out of all proportion?

MR. JENKINS: I won't comment on that.

MR. BLACKWELL: You can't win if you do.

Gentlemen and ladies, the one big issue that I think the American public has not dealt with honestly that we are going to deal with with the President, and that is the issue of crime. We are concerned about the whole ramifications and parameters that deal with crime.

We are concerned about the victims of crime who are primarily black and poor. We are concerned about the families of criminals who are sent to jail. The families are left literally penniless and without any leadership. We are concerned about the deplorable condition of the physical facilities of jails in local communities and States, and we want to deal with all of those things and all the probationary programs.

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So we feel that crime is a very major issue that affects black people and poor people, and we are going to develop some position papers on that and present it to the President.

Q What about blacks in white collar jobs?

MR. BLACKWELL: What about it?

Q Are you going to be concerned about that also?

MR. BLACKWELL: I think we are already concerned about all the jobs. We see an upward mobility in that area and we think it is moving good and we hope it will continue. That is all tied into education and job training anyway.

Q What distinguishes you from Democrats?

MR. BLACKWELL: What distinguishes who?

Q What distinguishes your political philosophy from the political philosophy of the Democrats?

MR. BLACKWELL: I don't think anything distinguishes it. Does it distinguish it among white people?

Q I see a difference between Democrats and Republicans on the basic philosophical level. I was wondering how you describe your position?

MR. BLACKWELL: Let me say I personally have never seen any basic differences. I think the differences come in locations, regions, but I have never seen any basic philosophical differences.

The big difference is that in America we have a two-party system, and you either belong to one party or the other party, and there is no in-between. It just so happens in America when the Roosevelt era came in, the Republicans lost the black people, including Mississippi -- well, I was always a Democrat.

I just believe in a two-party system, and I think the country is served better when we have all groups participating in both parties.

Q Do you believe that the President's pardon of Mr. Nixon will cost the Republican candidates, including black Republican candidates, votes in November?

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MR. BLACKWELL: I really don't know how to evaluate that. It is difficult to say. It is possible it could. It is possible it might enhance some of the Republican candidates. I don't know.

I don't think it will affect any of the black Republican candidates because -- I just don't think it would.

THE PRESS: Thank you, gentlemen.

END (AT 1:25 P.M. EDT)