

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 12, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

---

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF

SYLVIA PORTER  
CHAIRPERSON, CITIZENS' ACTION COMMITTEE  
TO FIGHT INFLATION

THE BRIEFING ROOM

4:28 P.M. EDT

MR. SPEAKES: As most of you know, the Citizens' Action Committee to Fight Inflation, which is a distinguished cross-section of American citizens, is still in the midst of a meeting in the Cabinet Room.

The President spent the better part of the first hour with the group. He called them -- and this is a quote -- "An excellent committee which can contribute significantly in the fight against inflation."

The group has elected Miss Sylvia Porter as its chairperson, and Miss Porter is here to speak briefly with you and to take your questions. Since she is the chairperson and the committee is still in session, we would like to limit it to a few minutes, if we can, and let her get back.

MISS PORTER: Ladies and gentlemen, as one of you, I recognize that the questions might be tough. Mine would be if you were here, but first is a statement of principle which we have just adopted.

"The Citizens' Action Committee to Fight Inflation is a nonpartisan, volunteer working committee. The committee will develop public understanding and participation in a nationwide effort to control inflation and save energy.

This nonpartisan committee dealing with a nonpartisan problem will mobilize the Nation through all of its people. The committee calls on every American, on Federal, State and local governments, organizations, business and labor to WIN the fight against inflation."

Now, before you ask me questions, I would like to volunteer something about myself. I am a member of the working press. It would be intolerable for me, in my position, to join anything with any political tinge.

MORE

(OVER)

As I said to the President when he first walked in the room, it would be for me committing career suicide, and that I have no intention of doing. I believe this is a tremendously critical moment in the economic and, therefore, political history of our country. I think that the consumer has been overlooked, and my proposal at the summit conference was that we should be called in to see what we could do, and to help.

It is in that role that I am here, and it is that role that I have been asked to fulfill. We have selected and have had accepted people from every spectrum of our society, ranging from liberal Democrats to conservative Republicans; from big and small businessmen, to outspoken representatives of labor; we have women, we have men; we have colors, we have creeds; we have us all, and if we have missed by any chance a spectrum of our society, it was because we did not have time to enlist the people, and we will correct that oversight.

Please believe me, ladies and gentlemen, not one of us in that room has any political ties or thoughts at all in this fight. And please believe me, I believe that, or I would not be here.

And now, if you have something to ask me, I will answer.

Q Is Governor Rampton up for re-election this year, the Governor of Utah?

MISS PORTER: Sir, I don't think I can answer that question. I don't think I know.

Q Miss Porter, you say you are nonpartisan, but I wonder, is the committee supporting the 5 percent surtax? Are you taking a position on the President's specific proposal?

MISS PORTER: No we are not taking a position at all on the President's anti-inflation program. We are developing a program of our own. The program that we are trying to develop at the committee meeting, which I just left, is one that will have to do with the volunteers and with people.

This would go far beyond many of the things that the President suggested. If you will recall, he brought this particular subject up at the very end of his speech to the Joint Session, and it was a separate proposal.

MORE

Q What points have you agreed on as of this moment; in other words, can you give us some kind of a platform as to where you stand at the moment?

MISS PORTER: When I left the room, we had certainly very well covered the field of energy conservation. We were well into the field of production of food.

Q Can you give us any points of conclusion or consensus?

MISS PORTER: This will be finished in about a half-hour. I think since a lot of it is probably going by the wayside while I am here or being developed while I am here, I might be terribly wrong to say anything since I don't know where it stands, even in the last five minutes.

But we are trying to develop a program which will involve citizens at the local, the regional, cities, counties, and States.

Q Miss Porter, what did the President tell you in the hour he spent there?

MISS PORTER: He told us he was very pleased that we had accepted. He was impressed with the broad cross-section that we represented. He was delighted that we all got here on a Saturday afternoon from a long, long way away, and he listened with great care, and I think he already has accepted a suggestion that came from one of our members that he report to the American public a couple of times a month on the progress of the effort.

Q Is this an ad hoc committee?

MISS PORTER: I would say so. We plan to be in business, however, for a long time because none of us -- although, our membership, of course will change -- this is not going to be an easily solved problem.

Q In the program you are working on -- the rest of them are working on right now -- has anything been suggested that is really novel, that surprised you as a possible viable suggestion to get voluntary conservation?

MISS PORTER: I had been surprised at -- I myself, and I have given this a lot of thought -- at the originality of several of the suggestions. We also have to look now, since it is just beginning, at the way in which the ideas can be implemented. You must understand we are going to break down into -- you can use your own words -- task forces, working groups.

MORE

I would assume there will be a small group of us who will meet pretty frequently in New York City, a small group that will meet pretty frequently here. I say, for instance, Ralph Nader works out of Washington. Mrs. Foreman of Consumer Federation of America, works out of Washington. I work out of New York. Mr. Alioto is Mayor of San Francisco. We are not exactly from one town. So, we will break down.

Q Miss Porter, you met in there for quite some time, and you said you think these are terribly critical times and that the consumer has been overlooked. I think there are probably millions of consumers out there who are waiting to hear exactly what you are doing.

Can't you give us some specifics or some of the suggestions, how the men and women, how the consumer can conserve energy, how he can fight inflation?

MISS PORTER: This is precisely what we are developing inside. I do not think we are going to have anything new that has not been already pretty well decided on energy.

During the fiasco of last winter, when we developed a Nation of skeptics on this, pretty much everything you could think of that could be done by business, by schools, by homes, was thought of. The road program of driving -- you know them as well as I -- and in looking over the list of hints, proposals, recommendations of that time seems to me they cover a very broad and extremely valuable range.

Since the energy crisis blew up in our faces -- and you know what happened to the Nation as well as I during the spring and summer of 1974 -- people forgot, or let's say, they decided they had been had.

Q In view of the statement you just made, what role do you have other than chairleader? You say you don't think your group will come up with anything in one of the two critical areas?

MISS PORTER: No, I think in energy the ideas are pretty well known. What has to be done now is to readopt them.

Q Are you going to ask to go back to turning the thermostats down and not driving when we don't have to and that kind of thing? Is that what you are saying?

MORE

MISS PORTER: I think the President is going to call on the American public the way he did in his speech to the Joint Session, to cut down their waste of energy. I, for one, am utterly apalled at the speed of the cars passing me on the highways that I ride on in Westchester County. Going 55 miles an hour is dangerous. Everybody is going to bump into you.

Q Miss Porter, in view of the fact that this country has a vast disparate distribution of wealth, the fact is a great many people have very little and a few people have a very great deal -- do you think volunteerism is the answer to these economic and energy problems?

MISS PORTER: I think the volunteer can do a great deal, if we believe. I have faith in that.

Q But how do you get people to believe, in view of what I just pointed out, that there are people who have a great deal and there are a great many people who have very little and with that problem it seems to me just asking people voluntarily to cooperate does not really solve it.

MISS PORTER: You not only ask them to cooperate -- I am told the committee now has their program ready. You not only ask people to cooperate, you ask people to help themselves. All forms of fuel right now are rather expensive. If you can cut down and help conserve, and help us become independent, and if at the same time you can help save your money on your budget and make yourselves healthier, I don't call that sacrifice.

Q You said the President agreed to report to the American people.

MISS PORTER: I said I thought that he approved of the idea.

Q What did he say that made you think he approved it?

MISS PORTER: I liked the way he took his notes.

Q It seemed to me what you were saying is this group is going to shy away from the political controversial matters. We are all for energy conservation. That is in the apple pie --

MORE

MISS PORTER: But going beyond energy conservation, I told you.

Q But I asked about, for example, the surtax, and you seemed like, "We won't touch that."

MISS PORTER: Now look, that is a political question that is up to Congress. I don't think this particular group is going to take a stand on the surtax because no matter what stands we take, the Congress of the United States will have that ultimate decision. In my own home, I cannot make a decision on the surtax. All I know is that I will pay it, if it is passed.

Q Just to help us understand that a little bit better then, I think we will not assume that you are telling us facts that your committee has adopted because we realize you came away and you don't know them, but give us a couple of suggestions or a couple of the ideas that were around so we will have an idea of the kind of things you are talking about that would be old hat.

MISS PORTER: Well, the President is making a speech on Tuesday, as you well know, in Kansas City, during which he will, I believe, announce some of the ideas which are coming out of this committee this afternoon. I think it would not be not only indiscreet but extremely bad manners for me to scoop the President.

Q But you do think he is taking ideas from you today which will be in that Tuesday speech?

MISS PORTER: I believe that is his intention. That is why we are here.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Miss Porter.

END (AT 4:35 P.M. EDT)