

OCTOBER 24, 1974

POOL REPORT # 2

Pool report on President Ford's trip to Melvin, Illinois, for the Les Arends' Day celebration.

A generally friendly crowd that State Police estimated at 10,000 met Ford, Rep. Leslie C. Arends, Mrs. Louella Dirksen (widow of the late senator) and the few others on the Presidential chopper. A handful of Vietnam veterans carried signs saying "Sign the GI bill" and "Jerry, can you spare a dime." Some students from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana had protest signs and a few unkind words. The signs included: "The people chose Allende. A crook chose Ford," "Nixon minus Watergate = Ford." The Peoples' Bicentennial Commission and the United Farm Workers also were represented.

Ford saw only friendly faces, however, as he shook hands along restraining ropes and there were the usual promises not to wash hands for a month after shaking the President's.

Ford played his customary speech themes with a soft pedal, devoting most of his remarks to praise for Arends, who is retiring this year after forty years in the House, thirty-four as GOP Whip. Ford saluted Arends' service on the House Armed Services Committee saying, "You know as well as I do that peace comes from strength and war comes from weakness" (at which point the Illinois students booed). Ford didn't accuse Congressional Democrats of contributing to military weakness.

Dwelling on Arends' longevity, Ford said that when Arends came to Congress, the federal budget was \$6 billion, federal employees totaled 780,582, and defense spending was under \$1 billion. Today the budget is \$305 billion, the payroll is \$2.1 million, and defense budget is \$88 billion. "I didn't mean to indicate," said Ford, "that Les Arends had anything to do with that. Just the opposite." During Arends' forty years in Congress, the Republicans controlled the House only four years, Ford said. Ford said that the secret of Arends' political success was his "door to door, barnyard to barnyard campaigning," and he compared him to Abe Lincoln.

Ford presented Arends with a plaque (Ford lifted it with some effort. Arends said it weighed forty pounds and concluded Ford must be in good shape).

Ford was greeted on arrival by Governor Daniel Walker, Democrat, who said he knew Ford "was down here on a political trip, but by golly, you're my President and I wanted to greet you." Arends told reporters that Ford's visit would be "a good thing psychologically for the Republicans around here."

Arends had this to say about the Ford surtax proposal and anti-inflation program: "I don't think it's very popular... The moves the President is making, whether they're too soft or too tough, I don't know, but we're moving. That's the main thing."

Mayor Richard J. Daley and Don Rumsfeld met Ford when the helicopter arrived in Chicago. "Hello your Honor, how are you?" said Ford. Several dozen people were waiting behind the barricades, notably an elderly woman who was chanting "full pardon for Otto Kerner," in honor of the former Democratic governor now in the slammer for bribery.

Forty or fifty demonstrators were arrayed across the street from the Hilton when Ford arrived, shouting about amnesty, Rockefeller, the Turks and other sources of discontent. Ford went inside quickly without taking notice of them.

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