

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
INTERVIEW WITH HARRY REASONER  
CAMP DAVID, MARYLAND  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1974

MR. REASONER: Mr. President, how many times have you been up here?

THE PRESIDENT: This is our second time, Harry. We came up several weeks after August 9th, and this is the second time.

MR. REASONER: Do you like it?

THE PRESIDENT: We just think it is great. We had good weather the time before, and of course today as you can see it could not be any more pleasant. A little chilly, but the atmosphere is just wonderful.

MR. REASONER: I was reading a little research on this place. The first time Mr. Roosevelt came was July of 1942. Where were you then?

THE PRESIDENT: July of 1942 I was on an aircraft carrier in Monterey, and we were just getting ready to go to sea. As I recall that date, just about that time.

MR. REASONER: Do you remember during the war hearing about this place?

THE PRESIDENT: I really don't have that recollection, Harry. I was over in the Pacific most of the time, and I did learn about it, of course, when I came back, but I don't think we were getting that kind of information in those days.

MR. REASONER: I was thinking it was such a short time since the White House was not air conditioned, that this place would have been a real necessity for any kind of -- what do you intend to use it for?

THE PRESIDENT: I think, Harry, number one it is a nice place to bring your family out and get kind of a family atmosphere, which we always had and this sort of gives us that opportunity. But it is also a good place to work. I brought up last night a pile of bills that Congress passed that I have to analyze and either sign or veto, and I have a number of other papers to read,

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Henry Kissinger sends me at least twice a day reports on his trip to Moscow and the other trips that are following. I have plenty of reading material and it is nice to be able to sit in a little different atmosphere and either sign bills or read material and, of course, we brought our new dog up here, which is quite an experience for her, and she has not explored fully yet but I hope to take her out and give her a chance to.

MR. REASONER: A dog could get lost in these woods. Will you bring foreign visitors up here as has been done previously?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we will. We have not done it yet, although a couple of weeks ago the Foreign Minister and the other figures that we are working on this proposal to consolidate the industrial nations attitude and programs to handle the oil problem, did plan to come up here, but they got rained out, or the weather was bad and they could not make it.

MR. REASONER: It seems to me that you are unique certainly in our lifetime in the way you got to the Presidency and in the fact that obviously you were not scratching and climbing to get there most of your life, which is the normal way to get there.

THE PRESIDENT: You know my only political ambition, Harry, was to be Speaker of the House, and John McCormack, my good friend from Boston, beat me three times, and then Carl Albert, the present Speaker, I lost to him twice, so my only ambition was to be Speaker of the House, and all of a sudden things happened.

MR. REASONER: Well, when you come into that and, you get all the problems. You get inflation. You get foreign policy. You get all the headaches of the Presidency. The well-known awesome responsibility. But you also get things like Camp David. Is it kind of funny, sometime?

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THE PRESIDENT: Harry, it might be very hard to believe but I really enjoy it. Things like this, of course, are awfully nice. I must say it is nice living in the White House, but the challenge of the problems I also enjoy. It is great to have the opportunity to make some decisions, hopefully I trust they are good, but as Harry Truman once said, "The buck stops here", and that is about where it is.

You either sign a bill or veto it, or you hire somebody to do a job or you let somebody go. You have to work with the Congress and, of course, that is where I have hundreds of friends, both Democrats and Republicans, and it is nice to call them and say "Can you help us? Can you do this?" And that relationship has continued. I probably do more calling Members of the Congress than some of my predecessors because I do have that close and long relationship with them.

So when you look at the whole package of things that are new I have not found one single disappointment.

MR. REASONER: That is great.

What about that way of becoming President, for other people? Is it possible that you get a better man if he has not chased it for twenty years?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a little embarrassing for me to answer. I do think it was wise that we have the 25th Amendment. I wonder what would have been the circumstance if it had not been made a part of the Constitution. I think there might be some disability in perhaps amending it to some minor extent, but whether it is a better way to get a President, or whether it is not the best way I would hesitate to say.

Actually, when I look back over the 37 previous Presidents we have had, I think the system has produced some fine people. As a matter of fact, some outstanding individuals, so I do not believe we should condemn the system by which we have done it in the past, because by and large we have gotten good Presidents, both Democrat and Republican for the times that were needed. So I would not overhaul the present system generally.

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MR. REASONER: You cannot ever tell ahead of time what kind of President a man is going to be, can you, sir? What do they say about Chester A. Arthur, his best friend said, "My God, Chester Arthur, President!"

THE PRESIDENT: He turned out to be pretty good.

MR. REASONER: He turned out to be pretty good.

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

MR. REASONER: Do you think anybody said that about you?

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure some people had reservations. As a matter of fact I think 25 Members of the House voted against me, and either two or three Members of the Senate. I have not let that, however, be any handicap in my personal relationship with those who voted against me, and I hope that they have not -- and I don't see any signs of their continuing -- any adversity in a hard, tough way.

MR. REASONER: Is it a good thing to know Congress as well as you do? Might you be in a strange way too easy on them, too understanding of their delays and foibles?

THE PRESIDENT: I have wondered about that, but I really don't think that is something that has adversely affected my judgment. As a matter of fact, I have called on some Members of Congress, both Democratic and Republican, to give me some advice, and I do think they can talk much more freely with me because of our relationship. After all we used to talk across the aisle in the House as well as in the Senate.

I do not think I am too soft on them. Some of them maybe I have been a little hard. But anyhow I have enjoyed it because I feel I can call them or stop in and see them or ask them to come down to the White House and we start out as friends. Now that does not mean we agree all the time, but at least there is the feeling we can exchange views without breaching any confidence or trust.

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MR. REASONER: Mr. President, tell me a little bit about this place. How big is it?

THE PRESIDENT: They tell me it is roughly 200 acres, Harry. It was land that was acquired some years ago, developed primarily or initially should I say by President Roosevelt, but expanded in facilities and much more used by President Eisenhower, and that is where it got the name Camp David, named after his grandson, and I think it is a very appropriate name. It seems to fit.

MR. REASONER: Another Shangri-la?

THE PRESIDENT: That is right.

MR. REASONER: After the aircraft carrier of Jimmy Dolittle?

THE PRESIDENT: That is correct.

MR. REASONER: These are guest quarters?

THE PRESIDENT: No, this is the place where the commanding officer -- it is under the jurisdiction of the military, that is his residence. The Navy has jurisdiction, not a bad assignment for a Navy Commander.

MR. REASONER: I have seen worse ships. They each have a name. That is Cedar ---

THE PRESIDENT: That is Rosebud. You can see they are all in the same style of architecture, which fits in really beautifully with the trees and the whole setup that is built here.

MR. REASONER: Why do you suppose through five previous Presidents it was kept sort of mystical? For security reasons do you think?

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THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding that when World War II came along and they started using it and again after President Eisenhower took over, they decided this was a very appropriate place, it was handy to Washington for the purpose of transportation, that it could be used as sort of an alternate emergency White House, and the net result is it is really.

MR. REASONER: You can run the country from here.

THE PRESIDENT: You actually can. There are some very appropriate security measures, and also communications.

MR. REASONER: The Presidential family lives in what, in Aspen?

THE PRESIDENT: In Aspen, right. We will walk down there. As I understand it it was the original lodge. It has been expanded, but it overlooks the valley there. It is a beautiful view.

MR. REASONER: You have the swimming pool?

THE PRESIDENT: Very handy.

MR. REASONER: Talking about running the country from here, did they come up here during the Cold War and dig pits and put in all that kind of facility? This was not the secret place?

THE PRESIDENT: No. No. As I understand it, anyhow. But there is complete security. They have all the communications. It is a place where in any emergency the President could actually operate in that capacity.

MR. REASONER: Why did they give it to the Navy, was that because of President Roosevelt's fondness for the Navy?

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THE PRESIDENT: I suspect that is the background, and you know once a military service gets jurisdiction ---

MR. REASONER: I can see why they would avoid beefing this one up.

How many people if you were going to have an international conference or domestic summit, how many people could you conveniently accommodate?

THE PRESIDENT: There are ample quarters for a good many people. There is a prime conference center. I think there are roughly forty -- there is availability for about forty people to stay here and, of course, they can come and go very easily either by helicopter or driving. It is only a couple of hours from Washington.

There is an excellent place for a cabinet meeting, or a larger conference, good accommodations for feeding as many as one hundred people or more. So it is a place where you could really bring the Government and operate it pretty effectively.

Here is another one of the quarters for people who are staying over overnight. It is called Birch.

MR. REASONER: That is where we are going to have our talk this afternoon.

THE PRESIDENT: Good. It is a very attractive place. I came up here several times in the last five years just for part of a day, and stayed over at Birch when I did.

MR. REASONER: Mr. Nixon stayed here more than any other President, didn't he?

THE PRESIDENT: That is my understanding. He and Mrs. Nixon liked it. I can see why. But it is so nicely kept and all of the facilities are so nicely blended into the trees and the whole situation.

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MR. REASONER: Is there a guest book back to the Winston Churchill days here?

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure there is. But I have not actually looked at it. I am going to take your suggestion and take a look at it because there is some wonderful ---

MR. REASONER: Interesting people.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, I would think, Churchill, Brezhnev, Khrushchev, Harold McMillan. I was looking through hurriedly a list of people who have been here. Many, many people from not only Western Europe and behind the Iron Curtain, but over in Southeast Asia.

MR. REASONER: Mr. Truman did not like the place for some reason.

THE PRESIDENT: I heard that and don't know why.

MR. REASONER: Margaret wrote she thought it was sort of damp.

THE PRESIDENT: That is Birch, Harry. It is the handiest one to Aspen, which is the place where the President stays. It is a very attractive inside as well as outside. I guess we are going to have our little chance to chat in there this afternoon.

MR. REASONER: Can I look at the main lodge?

THE PRESIDENT: You certainly can. As I understand it it was much smaller and has been gradually expanded, made larger. It was the original location for the ---

MR. REASONER: It would have been where Mr. Roosevelt slept?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, right.

MR. REASONER: Does it give you a sense of loss?

THE PRESIDENT: It does.

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MR. REASONER: This is your place.

THE PRESIDENT: This is where Presidents stay. It is the nicest place on the Camp David site. It is a place where you can really live as a family, Harry.

MR. REASONER: Is it big enough to bring all your kids there, or I suppose they could use another cottage?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the children would prefer to live off by themselves, but there are enough bedrooms so that you could have at least two other -- actually four because there are twin beds and two bedrooms.

MR. REASONER: Sir, you talked about enjoying the challenge of the Presidency, how about your kids, they had some mixed feelings?

THE PRESIDENT: It was an abrupt change, Harry. I think they have adjusted well. I think they are proud of the fact that their old man is in the White House, but it has not changed their lives materially, and they adjusted as I said to the fact that the Secret Service are with them. Two of them are in school out of town. Susan is living with us, and Steve is out on a ranch, and that is what they wanted to do and we are doing.

We hope to get together with them in Vail, Colorado, at Christmastime in a typical Ford family Christmas period which we have always done for the last ten or fifteen years.

MR. REASONER: You have got that place in Vail. Do you have any plans for any western, or southern, or northern, or eastern White Houses?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we will have any permanent place, Harry. We like the White House, Camp David, and if we go to Vail it will be just on a temporary trip like we hope to do at Christmastime. But to have it as a permanent place I think the answer is no.

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MR. REASONER: I am sure President Kennedy said, I think, to Mrs. Kennedy after they got to like this place and they were building another house, he said, "Why build a weekend house when we have got this for free?" Is that what you think?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that is my reaction. It is so beautiful I don't see any reason why we should have any other spot. There is tennis, a little three-hole golf course. There is a swimming pool. It is a total complex, and it is so comfortable and so beautiful, and it is so handy with all the facilities that you need as President. I really don't think we ought to go beyond it.

MR. REASONER: Every President should have one.

THE PRESIDENT: Well it is a great spot.

Here is another pool which I did not know existed. It is a pool with some beautiful goldfish, which I understand -- I did not know until last night that they take out in the wintertime and bring back in the summer. Apparently the fish would have some difficulty in the wintertime.

MR. REASONER: They are not sacred carp from the Emperor of Japan?

THE PRESIDENT: Not that I know of, Harry.

Isn't that beautiful up there with the water coming down and the flowers. It is just one of the nice things. Whoever designed the houses and the environment made a beautiful little extra spot here.

MR. REASONER: It must have been great for Franklin Roosevelt during the war.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Although I am sure driving up in those days was much more difficult than now.

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