

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 23, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
BY THE PRESIDENT
FOLLOWING A MEETING
WITH THE NORTHEASTERN GOVERNORS

WEST WING PORTICO

4:12 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: As I am sure you know, the Governors from the New England and Northeast United States had a meeting with me. It was a very frank and free discussion of the proclamation which I just signed, a proclamation which in my honest judgment was necessary, not for the purpose of penalizing any State or any industry, but for the purpose of getting action in the solution of our critical energy problems.

The United States today is very vulnerable to foreign oil embargoes. We need a program that will make us invulnerable to the possibility of foreign oil embargoes or any other action. This is firm action by me.

I hope the Congress will move rapidly to enact a comprehensive energy program, an energy program that I think is fair, an energy program that will make us secure against any possible action by any foreign country.

So, if the Congress moves, either on my plan or their own comprehensive plan, moves forward, then the country, our Nation, can be much more secure, not only for the present but for the future.

QUESTION: Mr. President, many of these Governors say their States just cannot afford the higher prices of oil.

THE PRESIDENT: Under my plan, of course, the State will get a refund for any added energy cost, if the Congress acts. Under my energy production and conservation program, individuals and businesses will get refunds from the Federal Treasury for any added energy cost, so I have a plan that is equitable. It is a weight the Congressional action and I hope the Congress will move.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, you spoke recently of compromise with Congress, not quibbling over details. When Congress asked you to delay your proclamation, you refused to delay it. Is that compromise?

THE PRESIDENT: The Congress is in session. The Congress has an opportunity to act on my program or produce their own, and if the Congress produces an equitable comprehensive plan, of course I will consider it, but the time for action is now.

We have diddled and dawdled long enough. We have to have an energy program in this country, and the only way I know to get it is to take the action that I took, which has, incidentally, produced more action within the last ten days on energy than I have seen in the last two or three years.

QUESTION: Do you think Congress is going to be fast in acting on this program?

THE PRESIDENT: All I can say is that Congress can act fast, and I hope they do.

QUESTION: Do you think you got the support of the Governors today, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: I think I have their support in the need for action, and I hope that they will work with me in producing action because they can have -- and I am sure will have -- a very, very beneficial impact on the Congress because if my plan is enacted, individuals, State and local units of government and businesses will get refunds from the additional fees which will stimulate production of alternative sources and will make our country invulnerable to any foreign oil embargo.

QUESTION: Did the Governors indicate they would file suit, sir, to block your fees?

THE PRESIDENT: They did not indicate that to me.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you at all concerned that the Governors do not seem to have been convinced when they left here?

THE PRESIDENT: There is an honest difference of opinion. I respect their views, and I trust they respect mine.

QUESTION: If this becomes a nationwide reaction, what hope is there for progress?

THE PRESIDENT: The Congress has the opportunity to act. The Congress is in session, and the Congress can act on my plan or if they have an alternative plan that is action, and equitable, then the Congress has carried out its function. But the Congress right now has the responsibility to act affirmatively.

QUESTION: The Governor of Maine says that you seem to be isolated and listening to just your own aides on this issue.

THE PRESIDENT: I looked at a number of volumes of alternative proposals, a number of options. I analyzed the various options, and after a thorough study and a great deal of consultation, I have put together a comprehensive plan.

Now, what we need as an alternative, if they don't like this, is something as comprehensive, as equitable, and I hope the Congress will take the initiative.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you indicated a willingness to compromise?

THE PRESIDENT: I have indicated a willingness to compromise, but the Congress has to act in order to have any compromise.

QUESTION: Mr. President, as you know, the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee has said your tax proposals will be held up by your refusal to delay your proclamation today, because they will have to study that now. I take it that, now, energy conservation is your first priority over your tax proposals?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. I have indicated to the Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means that I wanted the Congress to act, first, on the action required to stimulate the economy, and I hope that Congress follows that action.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Governor of Massachusetts, the caucus, says that you are holding New England hostage.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that is a fair accusation. I can understand why he might say it, but I do not think the facts justify that conclusion.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the people of New England feel that, despite the rebates and refunds, they will end up with less dollars in their pockets. How do you answer them?

THE PRESIDENT: According to the statistics that have been produced by the comprehensive survey and analysis that came to me, the total country will be treated fairly and equitably, including New England.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think the general public is behind you on your programs? Do you have a sense of general grass roots support for your plan?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the American people want action. We have been on dead center trying to produce an energy program for at least two to three years. There has been a lot of talk, but no real action, and the American people know that we were vulnerable to an oil embargo by foreign countries in 1973. They do not want to go through that critical crisis again, and so, they want me--the American people want the Congress -- and I think the Governors want the Congress to act. That is all we want is some action affirmatively, not negatively.

QUESTION: Do you think you miscalculated the amount of opposition in Congress on this?

QUESTION: Can the Congress legally rescind your proposal?

THE PRESIDENT: I fully understand the attitude of the Governors. They have one State to represent, but I have to take a look at the country's need for total action on an energy program to produce alternative sources and at the same time to get conservation so we don't find ourselves being held hostage by any oil producing country overseas.

QUESTION: Do you think the Northeastern States are feeling an extra hardship or burden out of this phase of the program?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that any particular state will be inequitably affected. Under the proclamation which I signed, the New England States are given a better break than the across-the-board imposition of the \$1 per barrel tax. The States in New England which have a unique problem are given special consideration under the proclamation.

QUESTION: Mr President, are you going to get storm windows for the White House? (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: If the Congress will appropriate the money.

QUESTION: Is that a new program?

QUESTION: Were you surprised by the strength of the criticism of the Governors?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: No, I fully understand their problem. The Governors, as I said a moment ago, represent individual States, but I have to take a look at the national interest, across-the-board. And my comprehensive energy conservation, energy producing plan, will solve the problem of energy vulnerability in the United States.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Ullman said they would try to rescind your proclamation. Is that within their legal rights?

THE PRESIDENT: The Congress does have the authority to repeal a law, but to take a backward step, in my opinion, is not a way to solve the energy problem.

Thank you very much. It is nice to see you out here.

END

(AT 4:22 P.M. EST)