

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
WHITE HOUSE SUMMER INTERNS

THE ROOSEVELT ROOM

AUGUST 8, 1975

AT 5:43 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: First, I apologize for being late, but the schedule had gotten a little jammed because we were, of course, away for ten days. We had to make some pretty complicated decisions, and they always take more time than what you anticipated.

So I apologize for being late, but then I would like to thank you all for being here this summer, 32 of you working here as part of the family and working with many, many people on a good many problems, whether it is energy, whether it is the economic matters or any of the other complicated things that all seem to end up here for somebody to make a decision.

So I thank you for that effort. You have probably heard me make speeches, so I won't make any here. (Laughter)

My experience in the past with summer interns -- I always had a group in my office or I participated with groups on a broader basis. The better way to proceed is to let you all ask questions. Since I have no prepared speech and you have heard the ones that I have given, why don't you just ask the questions and then I know at least one person on each occasion has an interest in a specific problem or wants to ask the rationale for a certain decision. So go ahead. Will you identify who you are and where you are from.

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MS. LIEBERMAN: My name is Nancy Lieberman, I am from Floral Park in New York. I go to school at the University of Rochester.

My question, Mr. President, is we all have conceptions about what the job of President really entails. Could you relate what your conceptions about the job were one year ago today -- (Laughter) -- and what aspects of the job you view differently today?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, a year ago today about this time we were just mainly concerned about the transfer of authority in the transition. So I wasn't really worried or thinking about the pieces that had to be fitted in at a later date.

But, fortunately, I had 25 years in the House of Representatives, and then 9-plus years as the Minority Leader serving under a Democratic President, and a Republican President, and I used to come down for meetings with the leadership and I had the feel for, as well as the impression, of how the system worked. And that was invaluable as the transition did take place. And I then had to transfer those views and that background into organization and action.

Now the last 11 months and 30 days, or whatever it is -- (Laughter) -- yes, there has been a better perception and feeling of the realities of the thing because we have had some tough decisions, some real hard problems. And so we moved slowly, steadily, tried to build an organization and a process. So today I think we are well organized and we have a good process. I don't say it always works a hundred percent but I think, as we move down the path, in the last 11-plus months we have put together what I think will work and I think has worked in most cases. But it will work even better as to the organization and the process and as to the way a problem can be analyzed and a decision made. It is a lot smoother and the net result, I think, makes for better decision-making.

MR. BROCK: My name is Larry Brock. I'm from Coral Gables, Florida.

Mr. President, seeing as people are always calling on you to improve the welfare of the country and, of course, you always have --

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Laughter)

MR. BROCK: -- what would you like to see private American citizens do to improve the welfare of the country?

THE PRESIDENT: One -- I have always said this to summer interns or to interns generally -- you have been here, you have seen how it works. You have been in the White House. The ones I normally dealt with were the ones that saw how the Congress worked and I always urged them and I urge you, too, to go back and tell the people that you are associated with in your college or your community that it works better than it is perceived to work. That doesn't mean it is perfect, I am the first to recognize it, whether it is the Congress or even here, but we have to, through people who have been here and seen the operation, help to restore the confidence in the American people that the process and the American people are working at the problems and doing the best possible under this system under which we live.

The restoration of confidence on the part of the American people in the system is of unbelievable importance. I think all of you who will be exposed to this and, assuming you are impressed with the system and with the people, do a tremendous job.

Yes.

MR. CONZELMAN: I am Jim Conzelman, from Bozeman, Montana, 150 miles from Global, Montana.

When you said a good team, boy, all of us can certainly agree on that and I would like to give you a couple of '76 campaign buttons which our office came through with. They are for Mr. Rockefeller and you. They are for your grandkids.
(Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. We are having the Rockefellers over for dinner tomorrow night to sort of think about what has happened the last year and I will pin one on the Vice President and pin one on myself. (Laughter)

MR. McCLURE: Fred McClure from Texas.

About a month, I believe, after you became President you had a group of young people, leaders of organizations for about two hours here in the White House in Washington, and since that time, you have spoken to a number of youth activities during the summer.

What sort of vibrations do you get from young people as far as their perspective of what their roles might be in helping to continue the ideas you might have for America?

THE PRESIDENT: We started that process of inviting the groups in on the basis we wanted an open Administration, and they were one of many groups that were invited in.

I thought you were going to ask me a harder question. (Laughter)

As I recall, I promised them that we would meet regularly with them. I do not think we have maintained that promise, and we will correct it. But we have been a little preoccupied with a number of other matters. That is what I thought you might bring up.

It has reminded me that we have not done it, so we will do it.

I have been to a number of universities -- Notre Dame, Tulane and others -- and I have just been really inspired by the reaction. I think the young people are eager to have communication with responsible people in government. It has been built up over a period of the last five years or so sort of an "iron curtain" between the young and government.

I can recall vividly going to some colleges in 1969 or 1970 and, believe me, it was not comfortable. The totally different attitude is really inspiring now.

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They have to understand -- and I say "they" in the broadest concept -- in that a very short period of time they are going to be running this country, and it will be shorter than you think. So what they do, what they say, how they act has to be related to when they take over, and somehow we have to generate that interest and enthusiasm and concern, so I think we have to talk with one another, we have to work with one another because in a lot shorter period of time than most of you think before you are going to be in positions of responsibility.

So get in the game, do not be on the outside. Really be a part of it. It is most important.

Does that answer your questions?

MR. McCLURE: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

MR. KRYDER: My name is George Kryder from Akron, Ohio. I attend Vanderbilt Law School.

I guess what I really would like to know is, in your many decisions in the last year, what would you say has been the most difficult? I know most of them have been difficult, but one probably was the most difficult.

And after that question, what has been your most satisfying achievement in the past year?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first month, we had a number of tough decisions. I don't know which could be identified as the toughest.

Let's think about the first month. I decided -- and I happen to think it was right, I did then and I do now -- the pardon of Mr. Nixon. I decided that we were going to undertake an amnesty program and that was very unpopular in many quarters and not too popular in other quarters.

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We had to face problems of the worst inflation this country has had in a good many years, and we had to find an answer. Well, those things all crunched on us in a period of about six weeks, and, obviously, they had a serious impact on whatever the polls mean.

But I believe you have to make decisions, you have to use your best judgment, not on the short range but on the long range, and those were three hard decisions. I think there have been a good many more pluses than minuses, substantively, and I think history will record that we were more right than wrong in all three of them.

What has been the best judgment? Well, if we can implement it -- this is an "if" because we have not come to the end of the road yet -- the most important decision, if it is fully agreed to and implemented, was the agreement that Mr. Brezhnev and I made in Vladivostock to put a cap on nuclear weapons of 2,400 and a MIRVing limitation of 1,320. We have not finished that, but we have received the framework, and if that is done, concluded, I would say that probably would be one of the major, if not the major, decision of this Administration.

MR. LARKIN: Bill Larkin from Manhasset, Long Island, New York. I will be a Senior at Harvard. I am also a history major, and I am curious to find out what past President you admired the most, and maybe you emulate, and your reason.

THE PRESIDENT: I have mixed emotions here. I like many of the characteristics of former President Truman. We did not have a high degree of similarity ideologically or philosophically, but I liked his forthrightness, his sort of decision-making process, his decisiveness and, if we can have that same reputation at the end of my service here in the White House, I would think that was a great achievement, because he was decisive, and whether I agreed with him or not, I like that kind of procedure.

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On the other hand -- now I am really limiting this to Presidents I have known or served under -- obviously I had great affection for President Eisenhower. I served under him. He also had certain characteristics such as openness, honesty, frankness that appealed to me as a person, and philosophically, in this case, he and I were almost identical, as I think of his programs and actions.

So it is a combination of one with whom I disagreed philosophically, but I approve of his decision making and another whose philosophy I agree with but might not agree with the manner in which he made decisions.

The young lady here. Yes.

MS. LAWSON: I am Melanie Lawson from Houston, Texas.

Mr. President, one of the advantages of being a Member of Congress is that you are part of a faceless blob, so when people get mad, they get mad at Congress. As obviously one of the most visible men in the world, give us an idea what it is like to be in your shoes, what it is like to be bombarded by criticism? I work for the News Summary.

THE PRESIDENT: I read it every morning about six o'clock. (Laughter) Sometimes I like it.

MS. LAWSON: What is it like? Your ego must take a terrific battering to have everything placed on you personally.

THE PRESIDENT: There are two good training grounds, at least in my case. Other obviously have different training grounds. I competed in athletics for quite a few years, both as a player and as a coach, and the training you get there is quite helpful because there are an awful lot of critics in the stands, in the newspapers and so forth. And you can build up an immunity so long as you think you did your best and tried hardest.

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And then serving 25-plus years in the Congress, you also are in a controversial area, particularly when you are in the leadership, you are bombarded, you are criticized, so you develop an immunity there so long as you think you are right. You do not like what you hear or what you read when the criticism comes, but so long as you have a good -- if you are convinced you are right, you do not have to worry what they write or what they say. Maybe your family might not like it as well, and they are not conditioned quite the way I am in my case, or others would be in their case.

But I cannot say I do not pay any attention to it. I just do not let it bother me.

MS. LAWSON: But isn't it fearful knowing you are making decisions for 250 million people?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it sure is. (Laughter) But you have to have a confidence that what you listen to and what you have read and what you do finally is right. It does not do any good to fret about the pass you did not catch or the votes you cast so long as you felt you did your best and had the right viewpoints. It is the people you know who make a decision or drop a ball and then worry and worry -- I just do not understand that attitude.

You have to have confidence in yourself. You obviously have to be cognizant of the responsibility. That is vital. You cannot be playing yesterday's game when you have problems in the game tomorrow. You really have to have your focus on what -- well, you have to have a long-range viewpoint, but you also have to focus on that decision you are about to make or you will have to make in a few days and be cognizant of the impact of the implication to all the people.

Yes.

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MS. McCLEARN: My name is Barbara McClearn and I am from Denver, Colorado. I attend Mount Holyoke College. I am a history major.

Mr. President, if you could choose any four year term in the 199 history of the United States, which one would you choose?

THE PRESIDENT: I kind of like this one. (Laughter) Really, we have a lot of problems but they are the kind that I think can be solved or we can make a lot of headway on and I like to deal in present and foreseeable future. So I think this and the next four years. (Laughter)

MR. KINNARD: Mr. President, I am Woody Kinnard from Kansas City. I am in law school.

A year ago almost you were thrust into the Presidency and we have watched you grow in the Presidency and become comfortable and we think you like it now. (Laughter) This was a growing process and we saw it all going on. At what point did this begin to happen and what made it so?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say after the first two months. I must admit it has gotten more enjoyable even though the problems are tough, but I have my people and I have our organization and that makes it much more comfortable and enjoyable.

So, I would say starting, roughly, the first of the year, at the latest, it all began to fit together.

Yes.

MR. GOLDFIELD: Mr. President, my name is H.P. Goldfield, West Hartford, Connecticut. I am currently in law school here in Washington. I would like for you to reflect for a moment over your last 25 years or more in public service and, as a Congressman and especially as a leader of a Party, you were a public figure, but I suppose you were able to maintain some private life as well.

But now, as President of the United States, you are probably the most public person in the world. What do you miss from your private life either during your congressional terms or during your private life before?

THE PRESIDENT: When you are in the leadership in Congress, you start to lose a certain degree of privacy. When you are a freshman, you have a lot privacy. (Laughter) But when you get in the leadership, then you start to lose it. When you come down here, it is gone.

But, again, it's learning to accommodate to a condition, or a circumstance.

I think I would prefer on some occasions more privacy but I understand that it is impossible, so I have just adjusted to it. I would like to go out, you know, and play golf -- that is one of the benefits of Burning Tree, you can play golf any way you want to, without a shirt on. But you can't do it in any other places.

But you learn to adjust to it. It is an internal mechanism that says you have got a responsibility and you have to take some of the bitter with the sweet and, again, don't worry about it, just accept it and adjust to it, don't try to hamstring or roadblock the rights of the public to see or hear or view their President.

I mean that it is part of our system and don't fight it. If you fight it, then you really have a tough time.

Yes.

MR. WILLARD: My name is Gregg Willard, from Pittsfield, Illinois. I attend Westminster College.

In the past year, Mr. President, we have witnessed around the world democracies come under the throes of internal corruption and strife and go the way of dictatorships -- the most recent being in India. As President, what do you think allowed us to weather our internal strife of Watergate and come out of that affair in what I feel is a much stronger position?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we owe a lot to our predecessors who established a structure of government and an integrity of the public to that structure. That permitted us to go through the traumatic experience that we went through. We have matured, based on a great base or foundation they gave us and I am not sure other governments could have survived the problems we have had. It is our structure, the traditions we have and the feeling and integrity people have to that structure that has permitted us to do it.

Yes.

MR. SMITH: My name is Richard Smith, Townsend, Massachusetts, graduated from Harvard.

This is for many of us, I think, a time of looking back, this weekend, as tomorrow marks not only the first anniversary of your ascension to the Presidency but also the first anniversary of the departure of your predecessor from that office. I wonder if you could give us briefly your personal assessment of the historical legacy of the Nixon Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: I think his foreign policy was extremely successful, very wise and forceful and successful in the area of foreign policy.

Domestically, I think there were more pluses than minuses. I think, unfortunately, the organization that was set up internally contributed to the circumstances that brought about the change and that, unfortunately, I think will also be written in the pages of history.

Yes.

MR. MORIN: Hi, Mr. President, my name is David Morin. I am from Hollywood, California, going to the University of Colorado.

My question involves just looking at the spiritual cycle of man. When he is brought into a crisis situation, all of a sudden he has turned to God, or when he is brought into a situation beyond his control, it is always a turn to the creator to find out how to get out of the mess.

I was wondering if your journey to this office and your current responsibilities in this office, which are very great to govern the land, if this keeps you very close with God in your decision-making and just your general awareness?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not one who wears his religion on his shirtsleeve.

MR. MORIN: I would have rather have asked you in confidence.

THE PRESIDENT: But I have no hesitancy in saying a belief in God and a relation to the spiritual has been helpful.

Yes.

MS. HOPKINS: Mary Hopkins, Wheeling, West Virginia.

I work in the Bicentennial Office. I was wondering, if you had the choice, where would you be and what would you be doing that you think would be the most beneficial on July 4, 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: I am pretty well committed. (Laughter)

MS. HOPKINS: If you had a choice?

THE PRESIDENT: I hadn't better change my mind. In fact, I think we are committed to go to several places, one, Philadelphia, two, I think someplace in Virginia. Some equally important -- (Laughter) -- ceremony, so I really don't have much choice unless I break my word, and I hadn't better.

MS. HOPKINS: What would you like to be doing on the Bicentennial that you think would be most meaningful?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what they are contemplating in Philadelphia. I think that it is very significant and it is fairly full, about four hours, as I recollect. You probably know better than I.

I think we better have one more.

Yes, sir.

MR. HODGES: Scott Hodges from South Dakota.

You have kind of reflected on what you thought were probably the most difficult decisions in the past year of your Administration. I am just kind of wondering what you think is going to be the most difficult problem to handle in the next year of your Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: Based on the track record of the last seven months, the energy program. And yet it is probably the one that has the greatest need for a solution of any domestic problem that we have. So we are going to heavily concentrate in that area because of its short-range as well as long-range implications.

In the international field, I think the successful conclusion, if we can achieve it, of strategic arms limitation, or SALT II, is a very key and important decision and solution.

Well, I would like to answer questions from all of you but I think I better go. I can see Mr. Rumsfeld is pacing the floor, figuratively if not literally. But I do want to thank you very much, all of you, for being a part of the family, I mean not only the family in the West Wing and East Wing, but EOB, and part of the family on a personal basis. We thank you very, very much and good luck to you and I am most appreciative of these buttons. I will see that the Vice President gets one tomorrow night and I will wear the other. Thank you.

THE INTERNS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 6:14 P.M. EDT)