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INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

IRVING KUPCINET

ON THE

IRVING KUPCINET SHOW

THE PALMER HOUSE  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

8:30 A.M. CDT

MR. KUPCINET: Ladies and gentlemen, we are proud to present the President of the United States in a special session of Kup's show.

Mr. President, it is so gracious of you to give us this time to air your views and to let the public see how good you look after that Vail vacation.

THE PRESIDENT: Kup, it is a great opportunity for me to renew our longstanding acquaintanceship, which goes back more years than we would like to admit.

MR. KUPCINET: We can say 40 years. That is all right, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: It is rather interesting to me how a relationship that has grown over the years got started right here in the City of Chicago, when you and I were on the All-Star Team back in 1935. I have enjoyed the relationship, and I look forward to the opportunity this morning to talk about some things.

Why don't you start off?

MR. KUPCINET: Very good.

First, I would like to let the public know that we are taping this at 8:30 in the morning, and the President has me at a disadvantage. He has been up since 5:45 -- if I know your schedule -- so this is almost the middle of the day for you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I have always been an early riser, and we have a busy schedule today. I am just delighted to have a chance to talk with you and to get an exposure to the wonderful audience you have all over the country.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, that is very gracious of you.

Let me ask you, has your vacation been disturbed in any way whatsoever by some of the reaction to your wife's comments?

THE PRESIDENT: Kup, let me try to put it in perspective.

In the first place, Betty and I, over a period of 20 some years, have had a wonderful marriage. We have great admiration and affection and love for one another. Our family has been very close.

We have three sons and a daughter. Each of the children, as well as my wife, have their own views. They express them, but it is done within the context of a very, very close family.

The fact that each of them can speak their own mind and the views differ doesn't mean that the closeness of the family in any way whatsoever has been disturbed.

I think it is also important to point out the great responsibility that Betty has had over a period of 27 years to raise the family while I, as a person in the political arena, have been out campaigning for other candidates, campaigning for myself, and the net result is that Betty has had the principal responsibility of raising the children, and I happen to think she has done a fine job.

She has established a high moral standard for the children, and they have lived up to those standards. So, her views have to be put in the context of what she has done in the raising of four children.

What she was trying to do was to explain to the American people that you have to have a very close relationship to the children, and if you have that relationship, if you have that understanding with children as they grow from youngsters to young people, the net result is that they do live by a high moral standard, which I think is the right way to bring children up.

If you set an example, if you give them guidelines, if you have understanding and love for them, then the net result is the children will follow the standards and the examples.

MR. KUPCINET: You have four wonderful children, as everybody knows. I got a big kick out of the press at your farewell party in Vail, Colorado, when the press serenaded you to the tunes of "My Fair Lady," and one of which was "I have grown accustomed to her views" in deference to Betty's comments.

THE PRESIDENT: I am proud of her, and I happen to think that, if you understand what has been done by her views toward the children, and her views on certain moral issues, she has done a good job, and I am very proud of her.

MR. KUPCINET: I hope, as a member of the press, Mr. President, that the press doesn't now feel it has a mandate to inquire into all of your sexual and private matters and that this situation can be put to rest at this moment.

THE PRESIDENT: I think it, being highlighted and explained and understood, will now get us back on some of the substantive issues that are important to America, and I am ready to answer any of those questions.

MR. KUPCINET: Before we leave your charming wife, though, she did make a very good point that, as a woman, she is very interested in seeing that there is a woman on the Supreme Court someday and I wonder if you have given any attention or any thought that, if a vacancy occurs, that a woman would be a candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course I have to be most cautious inasmuch as there is no vacancy at the present time and any premature discussions, Kup, of a vacancy, I think, would be inappropriate on my part. But I believe the record of my appointments of women to positions of responsibility is a good one. We have the first woman Secretary of the Department of HUD in Carla Hills, and she is doing a fine job. We have, for the first time, a woman the head of the NLRB, and we have other women appointed to positions of responsibility.

Yes, if and when there was a vacancy on the Supreme Court, we certainly would consider a qualified woman for that position of great responsibility.

MR. KUPCINET: I just wanted to give you a chance to answer that, Mr. President, so Betty won't have to poke you in the ribs to prompt you.

THE PRESIDENT: She will prompt me, don't worry about that.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, you have served a full year now in ascendancy to the Oval Office and I wonder if you feel that your political views have changed considerably. Have you moved from being the conservative of your congressional days to more of the middle ground as President of all the people?

THE PRESIDENT: Irv, I always thought that I did represent a middle ground in the political spectrum. Some of the critics who have said I was on the extreme right, I don't believe really analyzed my political voting record.

I would add this, however, as President you have to be more realistic and you have to be very cognizant of the practicality of representing 214 million Americans who come from large urban areas as well as those who come from the more rural areas of our country and, in being President, I think you have to sort of bring those elements together and see how you can, on one issue and another, integrate the views of the total population, the workingman, the professional man, the businessman, the people who are less well off, the disadvantaged in our country. It is a practical analysis of what is good for the total population rather than what views you represented when I had the honor of representing some five or six hundred thousand people in a congressional district.

MR. KUPCINET: Does it disturb you, Mr. President, when the right wing of the Republican Party says you are not conservative enough and the other elements say you are not progressive enough? Abraham Lincoln had a comment about that once when he said, "People attack me from the left and the right, then I know I am doing something right."

THE PRESIDENT: As we sit down to analyze a problem and what a legislative action or administration action can do to solve the problem, we do have to be very pragmatic about it and, when we are attacked by the extreme left or extreme right, I think you can say, if there is any solace to the criticism, that you are probably on the right track because the extremes on either side are the ones that are attacking you.

I, as we try to analyze the options we have, seek to come up with a solution that is acceptable to the majority of the American people and, whether it is in the field of energy, or the economy, or foreign policy, this is the approach that we adopt in the White House, trying to get an answer that works, regardless of the label that some people put on it.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, with a full year in the White House there, I might take a moment just to reflect back on what has happened during that first year and I wonder if you have any second thoughts about some of the major developments, like the appointment of Rockefeller as your

Vice President, which has come under criticism by the conservatives, the pardon of the former President Nixon, the slowness in developing programs, which I think is a deliberate part of your policy in making sure they are right before you go into anything, the Solzhenitsyn incident, failing to invite him to the White House. Do you have any second thoughts on these incidents which have come under criticism, or discussion at least?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me take each of those, Kup, and give you my analysis.

First, in my judgment the selection of Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President was absolutely the right decision. Here was a man who had been Governor of a large, large State for 15 years. He had vast political, administrative, governmental experience. He has taken over the position of Vice President, done it extremely well. He is energetic, he is an idea man, he has cooperated as a team player extremely well. His energy is unlimited. He has a good staff. He has done a fine job as Chairman of the Domestic Council. He has handled the investigation of the CIA and the intelligence community in a very forthright and productive way.

I think Nelson Rockefeller has performed extremely admirably in a very difficult situation.

There was criticism, of course, of my pardon of former President Nixon. In retrospect, I think most people today agree that that decision early in the Administration was a wise one, otherwise every month that passed, there would have been questions raised if and when I was going to do something. So the timing was better at the beginning rather than as time went on. It would have festered, it would have been a continuous question raised that would have kept my concentration away from the problems of the economy, energy, foreign policy, et cetera.

In the case of Mr. Solzhenitsyn, it probably would have been better to have seen him, although, as I am sure you know at the present time, he has an open invitation to come to the White House. I would be glad to sit down and talk with him.

On the other hand, I must admit we probably didn't handle the initial incident as well as we might have.

MR. KUPCINET: What about the other issue, the deliberate -- I presume it is deliberate -- slowness in developing programs in your first year, the caution with which you have been operating, sort of slowing down the whole tendency of the White House?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say, first, when I was a member of the House of Representatives and the Minority Leader I voted for welfare reform. I think something has to be done affirmatively either by making the rules tighter under the present program or I believe there has to be a total revamping of the welfare program.

I voted for a new welfare program twice in the House of Representatives. At that time I thought that was a better approach than trying to tighten up the existing program. We have a study now going on that will be continued to see what can be done in this area.

When I was in the Congress I advocated a responsible new health insurance program that would be broad, would be comprehensive. We are in the process now of taking a look at how we can improve the health delivery system in this country.

But in December of last year, I was faced with mounting government expenditures, a vast, a tremendous deficit of \$52 billion. And in light of the fiscal crisis that we faced, it was my judgment at that time that instead of a number of new programs that would have a serious impact on our federal fiscal situation, increasing the federal deficit in this current fiscal year, it was my feeling that I should adopt a "no new program approach" until we got our federal fiscal affairs in order.

We are in the process now of making some headway in that regard.

I don't want to forecast that that problem has been totally solved, it hasn't, primarily because the Congress has been continuously adding to the budget recommendations I have made and every time they want to spend a billion more or a two billion greater amount, that adds to the deficit. So we are still trying to hold the line. Depending on how we come out in this situation where the Congress wants to spend more money on old programs and where I am trying to hold the line so we can have some flexibility for some new programs, I am going to reserve judgment as to whether or not we continue the policy of no new programs for the next fiscal year.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, were you surprised with your success with the veto, the record number of 35 or 37 vetoes in a heavily Democratic Congress and which you have been able to dominate?

THE PRESIDENT: Irv, I was pleasantly surprised. After the November elections of 1974 where my party was overwhelmingly defeated in the House and Senate elections, I must admit I didn't think we had the votes to sustain a number of vetoes. But we have had some support from a surprising number of Democrats, and I thank them for it. And we have had a higher degree of Republican unanimity in the House and Senate and the combination has been such that we could sustain all but one veto in 1975.

I think this is a tribute to our system where you get not only your own party to support you to a higher degree but you get a number of the opposition party who have a broader interest in doing what they think is right rather than just blindly supporting the party of their own choice.



MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, you get an awful lot of advice, you know, from so many people. Quite a few articles have appeared in the papers just recently I would like to bring your attention to. One situation is the oil price situation, on which you may make a decision before we even get on the air, but the head of Mobil Oil Corporation earlier today has asked you to go slow in reducing the decontrol of the oil prices.

Is this going to affect your decision, which has to be made at the end of this month, in a couple of days?

THE PRESIDENT: Kup, I think you have to put my decision here in proper perspective. Twice -- before Congress went on vacation -- I submitted plans for a phased decontrol of old oil prices.

First, I said, instead of a precipitous cut-off, or a precipitous release of old oil prices, I recommended a 30-month phased decontrol, which would have meant about 3.5 percent over a period of 30 months. Regrettably, the Congress rejected that.

In another gesture on my part to show compromise and willingness to negotiate, I submitted a 39-month phased decontrol. I was amazed -- in fact, I was really dumb-founded, Irv -- that the Congress rejected a second effort to have a phased decontrol.

Once the Congress refused to compromise at all. I felt that there was no choice but to veto the six-month extension of the existing law.

We have analyzed the overall situation, and it is the best judgment of the experts in my Administration that decontrol at this point of old oil will not have the adverse impact that some industrialists are predicting.

As a matter of fact, I have been impressed with the statements which several major oil companies who say that they will maximize their effort to minimize the increase in gasoline prices and other fuel prices.

If the oil industry shows the kind of statesmanship that I think most executives in that industry have indicated and, if we do conserve, as I think the American people recognize they must, I don't believe the impact of decontrol will be nearly as serious as some people are alleging.

MR. KUPCINET: Arthur Burns, who serves as the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, made a couple of comments of interest the other day. He indicated to Congress that we may need some controls on wages and prices, which is far removed, I am sure, from the thinking of the White House.

THE PRESIDENT: Irv, I have said from the beginning we are not going to solve our economic problems in this country by a reimposition of wage and price controls. Maybe in World War II they worked, but the circumstances today are quite different, and I think the imposition of wage and price controls today would set back the recovery, not improve it.

So, I have no intention whatsoever -- and I must say I see no movement in the Congress -- for the reimposition of wage and price controls. I think they would be disastrous at this point.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, one of your pet problems, of course, is to sell detente, I think, to the American public and make it clear to the American public. Many feel that the Russians operate on this philosophy, that what is ours is ours and what is your is negotiable.

You said after Helsinki that you are going to be watching for any signs of their cooperation, either in the reduction of military forces in Europe, Portugal, all the other problems that would be indicative of their intentions.

Have you seen any signs that the Russians are following the spirit of Helsinki and detente?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think there is some evidence, Irv, and you, of course, may have read about the speech I made at the American Legion Convention in Minneapolis where I laid out the things that are guidelines for detente.

In the first place, detente is a plan or a program to ease tensions between the two superpowers, so that we can work together in easing or relaxing tensions around the world. It is my opinion that in the Middle East -- a very volatile situation -- the Soviet Union has been relatively quiet and has, I think, been statesmanlike in recognizing that momentum to the solution of the overall problems there are in the world's best interests.

In the area of strategic arms limitations, the agreement signed in 1972 was a first step in progress in holding down the arms race. There has been some criticism but, as we have analyzed it technically and with all of the information available, there have been no serious violations and where violations were alleged, we have investigated them and, where there has been ambiguity, the Soviet Union has corrected the situation.

So, detente is a two-way street. They have to give up something in return for our giving up something. The overall approach is to achieve success in moderating the arms race, in reducing arms competition in Western Europe through the mutual balanced force reduction program, in helping to alleviate the volatile emotions that exist in the Middle East.

I believe that if we are firm, fair, we can achieve through detente much more progress than a resumption of the cold war.

When we had the cold war in the 1940s and 1950s, we were really engaged in an arms race -- expensive, an arms race that could lead to an all-out world war, a destructive war that would have a terrible impact on mankind.

If we can limit strategic arms, if we can reduce the conventional arms race in Western Europe, if we can make progress in other areas through the vehicle of detente, I think it is the proper approach.

MR. KUPCINET: Have you seen any indication that the Russians are going along with the things you have recommended?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, I found in my negotiations with Mr. Brezhnev, yes, he defends their position, but I defend as firmly and as strongly our position. But there are areas where we can negotiate a limitation. At Vladivostok, we agreed to limit it at the figure of 2,400 the ballistic missiles, which means that their program will have to be modified. They will have to substantially reduce their planned development of ballistic missiles, and it permits us to have our program as we would agree under the Vladivostok general agreement.

I found at Helsinki, in talking to Mr. Brezhnev, there were some technical problems that must be resolved. There was no table pounding. It was a serious, constructive effort to see to it that their program for ballistic missiles, strategic arms, would be modified, and we, in turn, would bring ours into the overall agreement.

There is a constructive attitude, but it is not going to be a one-way street, don't get me wrong. I think it is fair to point out, Kup, that if we don't get a SALT II agreement with the Soviet Union, I will be compelled to ask the Congress and the American people to support at least a \$2 billion more per year military program to build up our missile capability, our cruise missile capability, our total strategic military program.

So, the alternative either is, one, to get a SALT II agreement, but if we don't, the military programs for strategic arms will have to be increased by at least \$2 billion a year and the Congress has to recognize that and the American people have to recognize that in order for us to maintain our national security.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, the American people and the Congress you talked about, do you feel there will be any flak over the use of American civilians in the Middle East? The introduction of the civilians there is being likened by some people to the introduction of advisors in Vietnam and you know how that expanded and exploded.

THE PRESIDENT: Irv, I don't want to get into what might be or might not be part of the agreement or settlement in the Middle East. I can only say that if that is a part of any agreement, a very limited number of American civilian technical employees in the UN non-combat zone, I would ask the Congress for its approval so there is no misunderstanding, that the Congress understands what the agreement is and they would have to vote yes or no on it.

Now if this does take place, it would be a limited number of American technical civilians who were there for a civilian intelligence responsibility. But I am not saying that is going to be the case. I am simply saying, if it does take place, the Congress would have an opportunity and a responsibility to either approve or disapprove this as a part of an overall settlement.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, as you go into your second year, your second year will probably be much more important than your first year because it will be right on the eve of the Republican National Convention in which you have a vested interest.

The prices, inflation, the economy, these are the things that keep a man in office or drive him out of office. How do you see the economy during '76, we will say the next year?

THE PRESIDENT: Again, Kup, I think you have to put it in perspective. When I took office, inflation was 14 percent per annum. It is down to a rate between 6 and 7 percent. We have made a lot of headway this last five months. We had a one month report that wasn't too encouraging but I happen to believe that it is an exception rather than the rule and

and that we will continue to make headway and progress against the inflation that we inherited back in September of 1974.

The unemployment figures are disturbing, deeply disturbing to me. Eight and a half to nine percent unemployment is too high. But, again, we are making progress.

We had a good report last month. If you look at the employment figure since March of 1975, you find that our employment has increased 1,200,000 in rough figures, which means that, although unemployment is too high, we are getting more people on civilian payrolls now than we had four or five months ago. And I believe you are going to see that employment figure continue to go up.

The statistics show that our GNP has gone up slightly and the trend is in the right direction.

If you look at all of the economic indicators, we are beginning to come out of a serious recession and, if we have good policies and we act intelligently, I am convinced the economy in the months ahead will be encouraging.

And the best part of it is that all of the reports from the various pollsters indicate that the American people are getting confidence again in the strength of the American economy and that is an important factor.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, the GNP certainly shows signs of ending the recession but the public down in the street doesn't feel the GNP, they feel the rise of the cost of bread, the rise of the cost of oil. How do you expect those things to be handled so that they will be reduced to a more "handleable" or more reasonable figure?

THE PRESIDENT: If we get the Congress to give us an energy program -- which they have not done in the first eight months of this session of the Congress -- the American people will get a feeling of confidence that what has been done is in the national interest. If we don't get an energy program,

Irv, we become daily more vulnerable to foreign oil imports and every day that passes without us having an energy program, it makes us increasingly vulnerable to the capability of the OPEC nations to give us an oil embargo, turn off the spigot and our economy then would be in a disastrous situation. So Congress has to do something in this area. They can't dilly dally. They have to move affirmatively. And I think eventually they will come to that recognition. Then the public will support those that support progress.

In the case of the economy, you can't be quite as dramatic. I honestly don't think there is any gimmick that you can throw out on the table or recommend to the Congress that is going to solve it overnight.

Too long, Irv, we have been in this country looking for pat answers or gimmicks, short term benefits and long term disaster. I think it is far better in this country -- and the American people seem to understand it -- at the present time, that it is better to have long term results rather than short term superficial benefits.

I can't go before the American people and try to sell them some patent medicine. I have got to tell them the facts as they are and urge them to cooperate and, if they do -- and I think they have -- then this country is on the right track for a long, long time.

MR. KUPCINET: Would you repeat that last answer, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Kup, as we look ahead, I have to be frank and honest and very candid with the American people, whether it is in energy, or the economy or foreign policy. I can't offer them any patent medicine that will give a superficial quick answer. I have to look down the road to what is in the best interest of the American people for the long haul. That is what is good for our country, good for all our people, and I am going to be as straightforward and honest in presenting the alternatives and I think the American people will support it.

MR. KUPCINET: Mr. President, your reputation for honesty and openness has certainly swept the nation, but a lot of people in the press like to paint you as, well, good buy Jerry Ford and leave it go as if there is nothing more. Does that disturb you because your answers today have been right on the head and fluent and made a lot of sense?

THE PRESIDENT: I like to be a good person, a nice guy, but I know inside, I know from the programs that we have proposed, that there is substance, and the substance is really going to determine what is good for the country. Our programs are in the best interest of the country. That is the way we are going to work in the months ahead.

MR. KUPCINET: Thank you, Mr. President, and once again, my thanks for being present here today and giving us the benefit of your views.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Kup. It is good to see you again.

MR. KUPCINET: And now we go back to the studio for the regularly scheduled Kup Show.

END

(AT 9:08 A.M. CDT)