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Office of the Vice President

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF THE
VICE PRESIDENT
Rochester, New York

(1:45 P.M. EDT)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. I want to tell you it is a real pleasure to be here and to be here with your two distinguished Congressmen in Rochester. I am just delighted. I am very happy to participate in so many community activities, the ones that are taking place today.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, we understand an attempt was made on the life of President Ford in Sacramento, California. You have heard about this almost certainly. Can you respond in some way to what happened out there?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It is a tragic situation that people resort to an attempt of that kind.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, is it a good idea for you to be out of town at the same time that the President is out of Washington?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, it is a big country and we are both in the country.

QUESTION: Does that sort of thing worry you, Mr. Vice President?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir.

QUESTION: Why not?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Because that is a risk you take. If you join one of the armed forces, you take that risk. If you go into public life, you take it. There is an awful lot of innocent citizens who are not involved in anything who get into serious situations. This is one of the tragedies of the time in which we live.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, when did you first learn about it?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Just after lunch.

QUESTION: You received a call from the White House, or from whom?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I get my information all the time. I am in constant touch with Washington.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, what does this tell you about the mood of this country?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Nothing.

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QUESTION: Did you talk to the President himself after lunch?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, Senator Frank Church's Special Intelligence Committee has produced some evaluations concerning possible CIA involvement in the assassination plots against foreign leaders. Why didn't your panel come up with the same information or at least similar information while you were in charge of the commission appointed by the President?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Of course, if you read our report or if you followed our press conferences, we examined this whole question of assassination, alleged assassination attempts, stated we could not find enough hard evidence to warrant the drawing of any conclusions, and therefore we turned over all of our material to the White House, and the White House turned it over to the Church committee.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, when you went South to talk to the Governors, you said you wanted to go there to prove you didn't have horns. Do you feel you were successful in doing that and do you feel now secure that President Ford won't dump you as his running mate?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I have to make some corrections on the statement. I never made that statement about the Governors. I have known the Governors for a long time, and Lieutenant Governors, as I was one for many years, as you may remember, myself.

That comment was made after some speculation about the South, and I simply said that I would be down there off and on and I thought they would find that by looking that I didn't have horns.

I am not a candidate for any office. I have said that for seven, eight months. I have said right along, as you know, or maybe you don't -- I will repeat it -- that the President in my opinion should not make his decision as to who he wants as his running mate until after he is nominated at the convention. That is the American tradition for 200 years. At that time he will make a decision. And by tradition the convention usually supports the President.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, Governor Wallace says you are beginning to talk like him. What is your reaction?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, it is a free country.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, this is a New York State question. As former Governor, you are obviously well aware of the fiscal problems of the State. What impact will there be in upstate New York if New York City defaults, and do you think that the Federal Government should get involved in bailing out financially hard pressed cities?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is a two-part question. The first part is that a default by New York City would have very serious implications in terms of the ability of other municipalities to sell bonds. The repercussions would be hard to estimate because this has never happened in modern history and certainly not in the largest city in our country. Therefore, it is a very serious and very tragic situation.

She asked a two-part question. As far as the relationship of the Federal Government to New York City, the cities are creatures of the State, as you know. The State creates the charter of the city, and so forth. The States have the responsibility. There is a special session of the Legislature at the present time to deal with the situation.

I think that we all have to keep in mind that through their financial procedures in New York City that they have accumulated a floating debt of about \$3.5 billion through deficits, and that this is the basis for their problem and that they have got not only to balance their budget but they have got to have a surplus to be able to pay that off.

Until the people of this country who buy municipal bonds are confident that that is going to happen and is happening, I think it is going to be very difficult to restore the credit. In the meantime, the States are considering an action to help.

The Federal Government and the President are deeply concerned about the question. As you know, under the present laws of the Federal Government, there is nothing the President can do directly without the action of the Congress. That is a question which is before Congress.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, do you believe that the U.S. involvement in the Middle East peace situation could draw us into a conflict if war broke out there in the Middle East once again, even though we only have 200 technicians there?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. I think that the involvement of the United States and the presence of the Secretary of State has done nothing more than prevent the war that might have involved the United States. That was the big risk. The agreement that has been made is a major step forward in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The 200 technicians is a maximum limit that was requested by both parties. The United States assistance as an intermediary in the negotiation had been requested by both parties, and this presence in relation to the nations which will be observing each side is a peace mission and not an identification with the war effort.

The whole thing in my opinion is one of the most constructive steps that has been taken in a long,

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sad history of conflict in the Middle East.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, are you concerned about getting tied up in a lot of civil suits such as the recent subpoena to appear in court over that \$1 million suit as the result of the death of an Attica inmate?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: As you know, if you are in public office, you are subject to suits constantly. I have all the time I was Governor, and since. One is being sued by one group or another, so that is just part of the risk you take in taking public office.

QUESTION: Do you intend to honor the subpoena and appear in court?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I will abide by my counsel's advice.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, could you clarify something you said in Warsaw a week ago.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It depends on what I said.

QUESTION: You would have gone in earlier in the Attica riot situation. Would you have gone in with the police officers armed? How would you have gone in earlier?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Excuse me for correcting the facts. What I said was, somebody asked, "In retrospect, would you have done it differently?" I said that in retrospect my opinion was that had the State continued its action to retake the prison when the uprising occurred which was being undertaken by the State police without arms, half the prison had already been retaken when the commissioner, who was afraid of loss of life, said that if he negotiated, he thought he could get the release of the prisoners without any death. If he had been successful, it would have been beautiful. Unfortunately, he wasn't, and it was sad.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, considering the fact we have an energy crisis of a sort in the United States, it has just been announced Russia is now the largest producer of oil, and is there any possibility that the United States might try to start some discussions to buy oil for wheat from the Soviet Union?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think that the President's objective which he presented to Congress in the State of the Union message last year, and to me is a sound program, is that we should as rapidly as possible become self-sufficient in energy from a national security point of view so that we cannot be threatened with blackmail of the withholding of sources of oil, that we could have our economy jeopardized, and it could be just as serious as a military attack.

I think the faster we become self-sufficient, that our whole emphasis should be on that rather than on

trying to make special deals or additional purchases.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, as a former Governor, do you think you bear any responsibility for the financial crisis in New York City, and do you think it will hurt your political image as you look towards the nomination?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I tell you, if you will read my message to the Legislature for the last seven years that I was Governor, you will find that I was talking about this problem of fiscal relations with the various levels of government, and particularly with local government, and made important recommendations which, had they been followed, this situation would not have occurred.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, if you were Governor today, what would your solution be to the problem of New York City?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I am not Governor and it is very difficult to project oneself into someone else's position, particularly five months, six months after the crisis has broken. Each day that goes by it is more difficult to deal with. But, fundamentally, the most important thing is the city balance its budget and then develop a surplus so that they can start to pay that floating debt.

QUESTION: You said this morning New York City should cut its expenditures.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is right.

QUESTION: How can the city cut its expenditures and not cripple the operation of the city?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: There are a great many ways you can do it, but not necessarily by firing policemen and firemen, which every time the city says they have a problem, or used to say, and came to the State for more, they said, "If we don't do it, we will have to fire policemen and firemen."

The budget of the city is over \$10 billion. There are 35,000 or so policemen, so that is not the answer. There are a great many other areas of expenditure which can be dealt with.

QUESTION: Did you ever warn Mayor Wagner or Mayor Lindsay they were spending too much in New York and the State could not bail them out forever?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We didn't bail them out. Our policy was to try and support and strengthen local home rule. The government is closest to the people. Sixty-two percent of the State's budget went back to local governments to help them meet their responsibilities and problems. But we believe in local home rule and not intervention. Policies were followed which led to the

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situation we are in.

I think in all fairness to the City of New York and to all cities and other levels of government, inflation has added very importantly into that cost; recession has resulted in a loss of jobs and, therefore, a loss of income revenue; plus the fact that there has been very major in-migration and out-migration in New York City, a total shift of population; plus a major loss of industries. So that they have got a great many problems, and it is a matter of deep concern to the President, to the Federal Government, to the Congress, to the State, I am sure this present Governor, and the Legislature, and to the entire American people what has happened.

QUESTION: Mr. Rockefeller, what went through your mind when you first learned of the assassination attempt on President Ford?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The President is all right.

QUESTION: What went through your mind?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is what went through my mind. Thank God he was all right.

QUESTION: Sir, have you ever discussed this kind of situation occurring with the President in the --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Which kind of situation?

QUESTION: An attempt on either his life or your life.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. That is something you just take for granted in public life.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, I am here representing the Rochester Labor News. I would like to ask you a question in the area of labor, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: The question is, when you were Governor, you stimulated jobs and you created thousands of positions in connection with the building of the South Wall. Now you are part of an Administration that the President has seen fit to veto bills creating jobs in the area of housing, the area of public employment. Do you ever counsel the President in connection with his prospective vetoes of jobs, job opportunities for working people?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I understand exactly what you are saying. But what you haven't said is that the Federal Government has a deficit now for this current year well over \$60 billion. Both the House and the Senate of the United States have set up Budget Committees

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trying to control expenditures. Of course, the President would like to sign these bills for health, for education, for housing, just as has been going on along down the line. But the President knows that the most insidious tax and the most insidious force in destroying savings, in destroying buying power of individuals, is inflation.

He has made the control of inflation the number one objective of his Administration, and the number two is employment; but employment for industry through the growth of our economy rather than government expenditures which add to the deficit and increase the forces of inflation. That is the tragedy of the situation.

He is doing it because he is trying to protect the long-term vested interests of the people of this country, recognizing you can't spend money you haven't got. This is the tragedy of our present situation.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, if President Ford gets his way with oil price decontrol, how do you think the American people will react to gasoline prices going even higher?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think that the American people are a lot smarter than some think they are. I think they recognize that the days of cheap fuel are gone, that we no longer are self-sufficient in energy, that we have got to be able to produce new sources of energy and they are going to be at higher costs than the old sources. Therefore, energy is going to cost more.

But the most important thing is that we have the energy for this country, because industry depends on energy, jobs depend on energy.

I know in the State of Ohio that there is a tremendous shortage of gas because gas prices have been controlled by the Federal Government, and the result is that controlled price is way below the cost of producing new gas. Therefore, the new gas isn't produced; therefore, the shortage. Six hundred thousand man days of work were lost last year in the State of Ohio because they didn't have gas.

QUESTION: What about the windfall profits that the oil companies are making?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: They are not making. The President has recommended that there be windfall profit taxes in order to take off the price control, put on the windfall profit tax and give the money back.

We have a plan that we have returned \$16 billion to the consumers of energy so that it balanced out the extra money they would pay. That plan has been before the Congress of the United States now since his message in January. So he is totally aware of the problem you are talking about; trying to find a broad-based, balanced program that would encourage production of new energy, that would take the higher prices and take that money, the windfall profit tax, and

take that money and give it back to the consumers of the various forms of energy. It is a very comprehensive plan.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, who do you think the Democrats are going to nominate for President? Gerald Ford said he wouldn't be surprised if it was Senator Humphrey.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea, and I don't think the Democrats do either.

QUESTION: What about Ronald Reagan?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I have no idea what his plans are.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, in light of the fact it has been recently announced that the organization in Southeast Asia to search for bodies of men missing in action be disbanded, does that mean the U.S. Government is going to abandon those 1,300-plus men --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The U.S. Government has been doing everything it can. It is not the U.S. Government that is doing this. It is the government in Southeast Asia. They have been trying to do exactly what you are saying. They have been pressing the government.

What they are doing is they are holding the search for these missing heroes as a hostage to try and get the United States Government to give aid to North Vietnam.

QUESTION: Thank you.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: A pleasure.

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(2:05 P.M. EDT)