

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 12, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(St. Louis, Missouri)

---

THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

JULIUS HUNTER

NEWS ANCHORMAN AND HOST

ROBERT HARDY

KMOX-RADIO ANNOUNCER

RICHARD DUDMAN

ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH

AND

JOHN FLACK

POLITICAL EDITOR

ST. LOUIS GLOBE DEMOCRAT

GATEWAY TOWER BUILDING

1:41 P.M. CDT

QUESTION: Welcome to Newsmakers. I am Julius Hunter.

My guest today is the most consistent and most recognized newsmaker in the world. President Gerald Ford is in St. Louis to attend a White House Conference on Domestic Affairs.

The Conference is billed as a town meeting, a chance for the President and the members of his Administration to exchange views with the citizens of St. Louis.

Joining me in the questioning of Mr. Ford today are Richard Dudman, Chief Washington correspondent of the St. Louis Post Dispatch; Jack Flack, Political Editor of the St. Louis Globe Democrat, and Bob Hardy, Director of Special Events for KMOX Radio.

Mr. President, welcome to St. Louis, and thank you for making this your first stop.

Our first question concerns a matter of major concern to the vast majority of Americans, and that is your personal safety. It is a frightening thought that a President of the United States would have to wear a bullet-proof vest, and we wonder whether this is going to become standard hardware, standard issue from the White House for future American Presidents and yourself.

We also wonder whether or not you feel that in the interest of national security, world security, you should modify your campaign style?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: Julius, let me say at the outset I don't think I should discuss whether I wear or don't wear--or whether I do something or don't do something--that involves the security.

The Secret Service makes recommendations. I feel an obligation to follow their recommendations. But, to identify, Julius, what I am doing or why I am doing it, involving security, I think makes security that much more difficult.

As to my desire to meet people when I come to either St. Louis or in New Hampshire, where I was yesterday, I feel it is important for the American people to have an opportunity to see firsthand, close up, their President.

In any job, you know, there is a risk of some kind. I feel that you have to balance or weigh the risks as to my own personal security against what is a very important aspect of our political life in America.

It is helpful for me to meet with the people, shake hands with them, get their questions, and it is just as important for them to have me say hello or to answer their questions.

So, as I put the alternatives or the contending arguments on the scales, it seems to me that what is good for the country overbalances anything else.

QUESTION: We can see that your vest today matches your suit, and is quite attractive.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you seem to be doing more than just meeting the American people. You are campaigning at a breakneck speed, with the election still 14 months away. You seem to be campaigning as if it is going to happen next week.

Why are you doing that? Are you afraid of Ronald Reagan as a possible rival? I would also ask you if you think this is a wise use of your time when there are so many problems of Government bearing on you?

THE PRESIDENT: I will answer the last question first.

I work a minimum of 12 hours a day, and usually it is 14, and the odd times that I take out to come to St. Louis, to New Hampshire, do not, in any way whatsoever, interfere with the conducting of White House business by me as President.

MORE

I have an excellent staff. They prepare the options for me to make decisions. I have ample time to read and to study, so when I come to St. Louis, or Kansas City, where I am going, or New Hampshire yesterday, it in no ways whatsoever interferes with the responsibilities I have, which are the highest of being President of the United States.

Now, I don't consider coming to St. Louis a campaign effort. I didn't go to New Hampshire yesterday for myself. I went there for the purpose of trying to elect a Republican candidate for the United States Senate.

Governor Reagan had been there the night before. That was not for me, but for him, or for our party's candidate. So, any personal campaigning has been minimal. The aim and objective of coming here is to appear on this program, to attend a White House Conference, to help the Republican Party in Missouri and Kansas City. I don't consider it a personal campaign effort.

QUESTION: Mr. Dudman also asked you another question, and that is regarding Mr. Reagan and your posture of his candidacy.

THE PRESIDENT: Julius, I like competition in the political arena. Governor Reagan has not announced as a candidate yet. He has indicated either personally or through one of his representatives that he may some time in November.

Governor Reagan was a fine Governor of the State of California. Until he announces his candidacy, I am assuming that I am the only Republican candidate, and I will welcome any competition. I love it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, with the seeming inability of Government to solve the Nation's critical problems -- oil, energy, the economy, the growing Federal spending -- and the seeming preoccupation about intelligence probes and pay raises and so on, what can be done to restore confidence, believability, and credibility in Government.

THE PRESIDENT: There are a number of things that I think can be helpful. There is not any one thing that will answer the perplexing problem that you have posed.

I happen to believe that a President traveling around the country, meeting people, is one way. The alternative for a President is to sit in seclusion in the Oval Office. I don't think that adds to the credibility or improves or enhances the public impression of Washington.

MORE

On the other hand, I think the Congress, which is an integral part of our Government, one of the three major branches, has an opportunity to also project itself, to improve its credibility by the work that it does, the answers that it gives and its efforts to meet firsthand the American people.

There are some substantive matters that have to be solved that would enhance the credibility of the Government as such. We are making slow progress, but I think constructive progress, out of the recession. Employment has gone up by about 1.5 million in the last five months, even though the unemployment statistic is still too high.

We are making headway in meeting the challenge of inflation. It is now half what it was a year ago. It is not good enough. We are going to have to do better, but as we move forward in meeting the challenge of our economy, that will enhance our Government's credibility with 214 million people.

Also, energy must be solved, and this is probably the most frustrating domestic problem that I face. Having submitted a plan, a comprehensive program to make the United States invulnerable against foreign oil cartels in January, I hate to admit it, but the Congress has done nothing affirmative either on their plan -- if they have one -- or on my plan, which I submitted.

I think the American people are frustrated in this area and our credibility as a Government is harmed. I still think we can do something here, but we have to achieve this improved credibility two ways -- by people in Government appearing to be human and by having the Government do things affirmatively.

Mr. Flack?

QUESTION: Mr. President, the latest poll shows that Nelson Rockefeller is not doing too well in the form of popularity. I wonder if you would give us some thoughts on the polls and how much faith you have in him and whether Rockefeller continues to go this way that he won't be your running mate in the next time around?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, you recognize the final decision as for myself as the Republican candidate, and the Vice Presidential candidate will be made by the delegates to the Republican Convention.

I am, of course, interested in the polls, both personally as well as concerning any other individual for President or Vice President, but I don't think that should be the sole criteria.

MORE

I believe that a candidate for President or Vice President must be either approved or disapproved on the job that is done. If a President does a good job, even though the immediate public opinion polls may not be favorable, I think the delegates ought to approve him, and the same for Vice President.

Now, in the case of Nelson Rockefeller, I picked him because he had done a fine job in your State. He has done far better as Vice President than I could possibly have expected. He is a hard worker. He is a good team player. He has got a vast amount of experience.

I think those attributes will be watched, and the delegates will respond to them at the Republican Convention.

So, based on performance and expectation, I would assume that the delegates would probably renominate him.

QUESTION: If I may interpret, as we so-called political experts do, that sounds sort of like an endorsement for the Vice President.

THE PRESIDENT: I certainly have to endorse the job he has done, no question about it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the speech to the National Baptist Convention, you promise that economic and social equality will become a reality for black Americans. That is a rather easy surface promise to make to a group that represents some 5.5 million potential votes. How do you plan to make that a reality, your promise?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, we are going to get the economy, as a whole, out of the recession, and we are on our way now to, I think, a substantially improved economic picture. In the process of that, the black American will also benefit, as all other Americans will.

If we look back on the last five years, Julius, we find that more blacks have gone to college, more blacks are entering better paying jobs. We are doing our utmost to improve living conditions for all disadvantaged people, including blacks.

We are seeking to enforce very vigorously the equal employment opportunity legislation. I appointed a friend of mine from Michigan, Lowell Perry, who you may or may not know, as the new Chairman of that very important commission, and they are going to do a good job.

So, through a combination of circumstances, the general improvement, plus specific actions, I believe that blacks as a whole, particularly those in the lower end of the spectrum economically, will be the beneficiaries.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to ask you a question about the Middle East. The United States, for the first time, is becoming directly involved there, and quite deeply, with the prospect of stationing technicians.

Don't you owe it to the American people in these circumstances to make public every American commitment that is being made and every detail of it that the United States has helped bring about between Israel and Egypt?

THE PRESIDENT: We have submitted all of the official documents to the two committees in the Congress -- the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the House Committee on International Relations -- and Secretary Kissinger has testified to those two committees and the two Armed Services committees.

We are working out arrangements to give the documents that I mentioned plus the content of any other communications between me and the heads of State of Egypt, on the one hand, and Israel on the other.

Now we have committed to give the content of those documents and those communications, but I do not think -- it has never been done in the past -- that a direct communication between a President and another head of State should be made public, as long as the content is there, the commitment is there. I think that is adequate assurance to the American people.

I would add the commitment that we have made at the request of Egypt on the one hand, and Israel on the other--they made them to us--authorizing up to 200 U.S. technicians, non-military, in a UN buffer zone. All of the details concerning that part of the agreement will be made public.

QUESTION: The exact words, though, won't be available? The sense of it will be filtered through selected Congressmen and Senators; is that not right?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the exact words of our commitment up to but not more than 200 American technicians will be made public, no question about that.

QUESTION: I understand that, but things like level of aid that is to be given to Israel?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: No, I must correct the record there. There is a negotiation going on now between the United States and Israel as to the amount of the first year's aid, economic and military.

When I submit the budget request for the total foreign aid program on a worldwide basis I will submit the details of the request of economic and military aid for Israel just as I will do it in the case of Egypt but that will all come as a part of the package for the total worldwide foreign program.

QUESTION: Mr. President, it has been suggested that we use our grain for Soviet oil or for somebody's oil. You currently have someone working on that in the Soviet Union now, we are told.

THE PRESIDENT: We have a high level group of negotiators under Assistant (Under) Secretary of State Robinson in Moscow now negotiating for a long-term purchase agreement by the Soviet Union up to, say, five years for American grain and other agricultural products. We feel that a long-term agreement with minimums and maximums is in the best interests of the farmer and the country, as well as our relations with the Soviet Union.

Now there are some very preliminary discussions going on concerning grain and oil, but they have not gone beyond very preliminary discussion.

QUESTION: Have you reached some level of amounts when you talk in terms of oil? Have you set a figure or a number of barrel amount?

THE PRESIDENT: We have no specifics because these are preliminary discussions. The Soviet Union, we understand, does have a surplus of oil. We have a surplus of grain so at least we ought, in a very preliminary way, just discuss any alternatives, but we have not gone beyond that.

QUESTION: Has any kind of barter arrangement -- if the Soviet Union cannot supply the oil in exchange for grain, are you hoping that they will exert their influence over the Arabs who listen to them?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there is a better way to exercise our influence with the Arab nations and that is through the International Energy Agency, which was set up or promoted primarily by the United States about a year ago, where the basic industrial consuming nations have joined together to meet with the producing nations -- OPEC, for example.

We are negotiating directly with them. I think that has more potential than relying on the Soviet Union to help us with the Arab nations.

MORE

Our relations with the Arabs are good. I don't think we have to go through the Soviet Union in this case or any other case, as far as dealing with Arab nations.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if Israel is expelled from the United Nations, would the United States withdraw, and can you foresee any circumstances that might prompt the U.S. to withdraw from the UN?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't expect the United Nations to kick Israel out, and, of course, the United States would vigorously protest and vote against any such effort on the part of any nation or nations. We believe that the prospects for that happening have subsided considerably, particularly since the agreement between Egypt on the one hand and Israel on the other.

If we can continue to have momentum in the Middle East -- which I think will continue -- the prospects of Arab nations and other non-aligned nations trying to kick Israel out becomes less and less.

In other words, the position of Israel in the United Nations becomes stronger as we keep momentum going for a solution, a long-term solution, to the problems in the Middle East.

To answer your last question, I foresee no circumstances where the United States would leave the United Nations. I think it would be a mistake. It is good for us to be a part of that forum.

QUESTION: You have had problems there in the past.

THE PRESIDENT: We have problems in other forums as well. I have always found the best way to win a game is to play it, not to sit on the sidelines, and the United States ought to be in the game in the United Nations to protect our interests. It is a lot better inside than sitting out doing nothing.

QUESTION: Would it be in the interests of the U.S. to try to arrive at a formula sometime so that North and South Vietnam could enter the United Nations? They were vetoed this time because of the connection with Korea. But, isn't it true that the United States continues to have a great interest in that part of the world, and isn't there a danger that relations with North and South Vietnam can get into a deep freeze the way China and Cuba did for so many years, to nobody's advantage?

MORE



THE PRESIDENT: We believe in the universality of the United Nations. We feel that it is in the interest of the world as a whole to have all nations that want to become a part of the United Nations be members, but the effort of North and South Vietnam to get in was predicated on their coming in alone.

We felt if North and South Vietnam were to be a part of the United Nations, South Korea, that has had its application in to be a member for a good many years, also ought to be included. You can't be selective on who or what nation should be a part of the United Nations.

I presume, based on our overall interest in matters involving Southeast Asia, that it is conceivable under certain circumstances that our relations with North and South Vietnam will improve, but a lot has to happen.

For example, North Vietnam continues to refuse to give us information concerning the MIA's and they try to bribe us by saying "we will give you information about MIA's if you will let us in the United Nations."

Well, North Vietnam agreed in January of 1973 to give us information, to give us access to North Vietnam to find the MIA's, and they have not lived up to it, so how can we trust them? They have got a lot of things to do before we are going to be very receptive to their participation.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, busing is a subject, a practice that is distasteful to a large segment of the American population, both black and white. If it is such a distasteful and wasteful process, why bus? Is there any alternative that you see?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that we have to decide, in the first place, what we are really trying to do by busing before you discuss whether it is good or bad. All of us -- white, black, every American, in my opinion -- wants quality education.

Now, the court decided in 1954 that separate but equal schools were constitutional and the courts have decided that busing is one way to try and desegregate on the one hand and perhaps improve education on the other.

Many of those decisions have raised great problems in many, many localities -- Louisville and Boston being the most prominent at the present time.

Discussing those two communities, let me very strongly emphasize the court has decided something. That is the law of the land. As far as my Administration is concerned, the law of the land will be upheld, and we are upholding it.

But then, I think I have the right to give what I think is a better answer to the achievement of quality education, which is what we all seek, and there is always more than one answer.

I think that quality education can be enhanced by better school facilities, lower pupil-teacher ratios, the improvement of the neighborhood, as such. Those are better answers, in my judgment, than busing under a court order.

Quality education can be achieved by more than one method. I was reading in the Washington Post this morning a column by one of the outstanding black columnists, Mr. Raspberry, and Mr. Raspberry has come to the conclusion that court ordered, forced busing, is not the way to achieve quality education for blacks or whites in a major metropolitan area.

That is a very significant decision by Mr. Raspberry, who I think Mr. Dudman, for example, highly respects.

QUESTION: I certainly do.

In Boston and Louisville, where the court has ordered busing, how well do you think the people of those two cities have conducted themselves in bringing about court ordered exchanges of black and white students?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: There have been some disorders there over the last year or more.

QUESTION: I am thinking about this fall. There have been Federal agents there, of course, to try to maintain order. Are you reasonably well satisfied with the way things have happened or not?

THE PRESIDENT: So far, there has been a minimum of local disorder. I hope that that attitude can prevail in the months ahead as the police involvement and the Federal marshal involvement becomes less and less.

I am also an optimist, even though I disagree with the method by which they are trying to achieve quality education.

QUESTION: Are you counseling the people of those two cities to cooperate with the courts, or are you encouraging them to maintain their strong feelings in some cases that this is an improper solution?

THE PRESIDENT: Last year I did a televised tape urging the people of Boston to cooperate with the court and to maintain law and order. I did that then, and I have counseled everybody that I talked with in Boston to encourage their fellow Bostonians to obey the law and follow the court's action.

QUESTION: We have time for one short question and one short answer.

QUESTION: Mr. President, assuming your nomination, will you agree to broadcast debates with the nominee of the other party?

THE PRESIDENT: That gets into some problems involving the current law. I am not sure that a public debate on television is the best way for the public to analyze a candidate. I don't rule it out, but I won't make any firm commitment at this time.

QUESTION: What about a public debate on the radio?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is a possibility, but I would not want to make a firm commitment at this time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a cartoon in the newspaper recently mentioned that your wife's comments on the CBS program, Face the Nation, would only hurt your campaign if she ran against you. (Laughter)

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I am very proud of her, and we had a wonderful marriage. We have in our family the right of Betty, as well as the children, to speak their minds. I think she was misunderstood to some extent, and I repeat, I am proud of her and we have had a very happy marriage.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for being with us today in St. Louis.

Welcome, again.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

END (AT 1:33 P.M. CDT)