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THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

DAVID S. BRODER, WASHINGTON POST

GEORGE F. WILL, NATIONAL REVIEW

BILL MONROE, NBC

AND

JAMES B. RESTON, NEW YORK TIMES

ON

MEET THE PRESS

11:30 A.M. EST

MR. SPIVAK: Today Meet the Press celebrates its 28th Anniversary on television. Our guest in the full hour special edition is the President of the United States, Gerald R. Ford.

MR. MONROE: Mr. President, do you sense a considerable negative public reaction to the governmental changes of last weekend based on such appearances as a Defense Secretary abruptly fired and a Vice President driven out of contention by Republican conservatives?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't find that at all, Mr. Monroe. We have had a minimal amount of correspondence, either telegram or otherwise, and certainly nothing comparable to any other major change in an Administration.

MR. MONROE: You chose Mr. Rockefeller as Vice President and you have often praised him. You apparently were relieved by his withdrawal judging by the fact you did not argue against it. Can you give us your reasoning on that?

THE PRESIDENT: I was not relieved by the Vice President's withdrawal. On the other hand, I have nothing but the highest respect and regard for him. He is an experienced, able public servant and a very close personal friend of mine. On the other hand, he is a very mature person and had made his decision for the reasons he set forth in his letter which he personally delivered to me.

When a man of that stature and that experience makes a decision, I have to abide by it.

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MR. MONROE: Did the thinking prevalent in Washington to the effect that his withdrawal could take some of the steam out of the conservative challenge to you within the Republican Party, did that not enter into your consideration at all?

THE PRESIDENT: I would go back to the letter that he personally delivered to me and we agreed that that set forth, which it did, the reasons for his withdrawal and I respected his judgment.

MR. MONROE: Is there at least a potential conflict, Mr. President, between the idea Mr. Rockefeller will support you next year and his refusal to take himself out as a possible candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: In a personal conversation with him he indicated to me his continued support for my Presidency. There is a problem in that as he travels around the country, he has to abide by, as he should, and I want him to, the rules and regulations under the new Federal Election Law. But as far as a personal endorsement, he told me he would continue to support my Presidency.

MR. SPIVAK: Thank you, Mr. President. We will be back to introduce our other panel members and continue the questioning, but first this message.

(Commercial)

MR. SPIVAK: Ready now to resume our special anniversary edition of Meet the Press with the President of the United States.

You have just met Bill Monroe of NBC News. The other questioners on our panel today are James B. Reston of the New York Times, George F. Will of the National Review and David S. Broder of the Washington Post. We will continue the questions now with Mr. Reston.

MR. RESTON: This is an easy one, Mr. President. There seems to be a great deal of anxiety in the country at the present time and I wonder if you would define for us what you think the spirit of the country, the mood of the country is, and, second, tell us what are the qualities you think we should be looking for in a President in the next five years?

THE PRESIDENT: The country has gone through, in the last year or year and a half, some very difficult times. We went through the problems of Watergate. We have been suffering from a very serious economic recession, although we are coming out of it very steadily. We have had a traumatic experience in Southeast Asia. All of these and perhaps some other problems raised some doubts in the American people as to whether their Government, their form of Government, was capable of meeting these kind of challenges.

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This doubt, I think, has been considerably reversed and I think that is extremely encouraging. They know that honesty and candor has been restored in Government. They know that we are making headway in resolving our economic problems. They know that we withdrew from Southeast Asia and Vietnam as best we could and still have not lost our traditional friends in the rest of the Pacific area.

This doubt that was very serious a few months ago I think is being resolved. And I am encouraged by what I see and what I hear. There is a new vitality growing among our people and this is vitally important as we meet those challenges. It is wholesome, it is getting more vigorous and I think it will have a beneficial impact on our country as a whole.

MR. RESTON: You mentioned the question of candor, but I think you left the impression during your recent switches that there were no policy differences between Kissinger and Secretary Schlesinger and indeed you were not as candid in that entire switch as you had been in the early months or year of your Administration. Is that a fair --

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Reston, oftentimes the simple truth is not understood and the answers I gave at that press conference on last Monday was the simple truth. There were no hidden motives, there were no devious actions taken. The simple truth is the best answer and that was the answer and I think that reflects my personal candor.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Will.

MR. WILL: Mr. President, you have nominated two very political men, Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Bush, to replace two apolitical men, Mr. Schlesinger and Mr. Colby, in the sense of the national security positions and this has caused Senator Jackson to wonder if you are surrounding yourself with yes men and lackeys and others are worried that national security advice to you will be politically colored by men who are perhaps interested in becoming your Vice Presidential running mate in 1976. Might it help both for the anxiety of the country and any possible Senate fight over these nominations for you to say now neither of those men will be your running mate in 1976?

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THE PRESIDENT: First, I think it is very appropriate for me to say anyone who knows George Bush and who knows Don Rumsfeld knows either one or both of them are honest individuals who can perform fine Governmental functions without any political ramification. George Bush did it at the UN and George Bush is performing that function in China today. Don Rumsfeld did it as head of the Price Council and he did it when he was our NATO Ambassador for two years in Western Europe. Those individuals will, in their new responsibilities, do an exceptionally good job. I don't think people with talents, individuals with capabilities and a record ought to be excluded from any further public service.

MR. WILL: The firing of Mr. Schlesinger has caused some anxieties in some parts of the country about the commitments of this Administration to a strong national defense and in firming your commitment two days ago in Boston you complained very vigorously about the cuts that seem to be coming from the House and the Senate in the defense bill.

Do you feel as strongly about that as you do about the school lunch bill and those things where you have used your veto power and have taken the issue to the country?

THE PRESIDENT: I will make that judgment on the defense bill when the legislation is finally approved. I am deeply disappointed in the reductions that were made in the House and the relatively small increases voted by the Senate committee. I hope the Senate as a whole will restore more of the reductions that were made.

It is premature for me to indicate at this stage of the legislative process that I will veto or not veto. I will continue to work with Members of the House and the Senate to get as much military appropriation restored as possible because the budget I submitted in January was a good budget that is needed and necessary for the national security of the United States.

I will work with the new Secretary and his associates to try and restore as much as I can of that budget cut that so far is roughly \$7 billion.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Broder.

MR. BRODER: Mr. President, accepting the changes in your Administration were the simple truth, I am still puzzled as to why that situation changed for you apparently during the month of October or early November? I noted, for example, when you were asked about possible differences between Mr. Schlesinger and Mr. Kissinger in an interview in Omaha on October 1, you said, "I have two fine Secretaries and if there are any differences I make the choice and sometimes it is healthy to have a different viewpoint as long as somebody can make a decision." Did you decide it was unhealthy?

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THE PRESIDENT: I found, Mr. Broder, in the last month or so that there was not as comfortable a feeling in the situation that I desired and that it was creating some problems. This doesn't mean that either of those individuals was not performing his job in a very effective way, but for me to do the job as well as I possibly can I need a feeling of comfort within an organization -- no tension, complete cohesion -- and it doesn't necessarily mean that those individuals agreed in every precise detail.

It does mean that on two, at least, major issues -- the Vladivostok agreement that I made for SALT II and the Sinai agreement where we sent the advisers -- they totally agreed. But there was a growing tension and I felt very strongly that I needed to have a comfortable feeling even though people might disagree.

MR. BRODER: Was that tension involving both men, because I noted on the next day, after that comment you made about the two Secretaries, you also said in reference to Dr. Kissinger's two jobs, "That is no problem, in my opinion." Was the problem that you saw with both Kissinger and Schlesinger in their relationship with you?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say that it was an overall problem and I felt that the best way to remedy it was to take the actions that I did. Now that doesn't mean that Secretary Kissinger and Don Rumsfeld will agree. They probably won't in some areas but I think the atmosphere will be infinitely better and permit me as President to do a better job.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, you have been criticized by some members of the press about not having a clearly stated philosophy and some relevant goals. Can you tell us what your goals are for this country?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Spivak, I would like to give you the vision that I have for the future of America. It is a vision where I think the Government will not dictate the lives of the American people, where the Government, on the other hand, will be compassionate with those who are unfortunately unable to take care of themselves. It is a vision that will permit the people to govern the Government and, on the other hand, it will permit the American people to lead their own lives within the laws and the Constitution as they desire for themselves. It is a vision, also, that means that the United States should continue its never ending pursuit of peace through strength, reassuring our allies and consulting and discussing with our adversaries. It is a very broad goal but it is the kind of vision that I think is needed and necessary for the decades ahead.

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MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, when you formally announced that you would seek the Republican nomination for the Presidency, you -- and I quote -- you would seek the job you began.

THE PRESIDENT: In the broadest possible terms, yes.

MR. SPIVAK: You have been in office for 15 months. What do you think your major accomplishment has been towards that end or towards any end?

THE PRESIDENT: There are at least three things I think are great pluses. I feel very strongly, and I think the polls reflect it, that I have restored public confidence in their Government at the Federal level. I believe also that we have made considerable headway in handling constructively a very serious economic situation that developed shortly after I became the President. I believe also that we are slowly but surely making headway toward a resolution of our dependence on foreign oil. We are getting, hopefully, a bit of progress and necessary action in the area of energy independence.

In addition, we have continued to strengthen our alliances in Europe, we have had a very successful result in the Middle East with the Sinai agreement, and we are continuing to work with both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in a constructive way. These are the broad areas where I think we have made significant progress.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, on the matter of restoring trust in Government, how do you reconcile what you have just said with the recent findings of pollsters, that public confidence in Government is probably lower than it has ever been since they began to measure these things scientifically?

THE PRESIDENT: This is bothersome because it is a public view, according to the people I think we are both thinking of, a public unhappiness with the Executive Branch, the Congress and even the courts, to some extent. On the other hand, there was a very recent poll that related precisely to myself, some 74 to 17 indicating a belief in my honesty and candor. That is not enough because I want all of our Government, whether it is the President or the Congress or the courts, to have public support and all of us have to work at it.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Monroe.

MR. MONROE: Mr. President, to follow up for a moment on your remarks to Mr. Broder, the firing of Secretary Schlesinger appeared to be abrupt, especially considering the fact that you apparently had an hour and a half meeting with him on Saturday, I gather talking about defense matters, no mention of his leaving the Government, called him back the next morning, less than 24 hours later, and let him out of the Government. Could you comment on that?

THE PRESIDENT: The meeting I had with Mr. Schlesinger on Saturday was a long-scheduled meeting, as I recall, requested by him to talk about some personnel matters and to talk about other defense problems. At that time, I was not cognizant of some leaks that had appeared here in Washington and elsewhere. I had not planned to make the decision and to announce it on Monday but the development of these leaks and the information getting out in part, not in whole, prompted me to make the decision to see Secretary Schlesinger the next morning.

MR. MONROE: Did your Sunday conversation involve any issue between the two of you where maybe you put one emphasis on it and he put emphasis on the other? Was there a difference between the two of you?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I ought to discuss personal conversations. I said in my press conference on Monday night that I had great respect for him as a person, I appreciated the fine job he had done at the Pentagon, and his other service as head of the AEC and NASC but, as I explained in response to Mr. Broder, there had been a growing tension and I was uncomfortable in the situation but I don't think I should go beyond that in discussing our conversation.

MR. MONROE: When you said you made those changes totally on your own, did you mean you had no advice on those changes from anybody?

THE PRESIDENT: I, in one way or another, got some advice but I did not ask anybody. I made the decision myself. It is a matter that I had been thinking about for some time and I have the evidence where I sat down myself and wrote out the changes and it was a totally private decision which Presidents have to make on occasion. That is their responsibility under the law and this was my decision and it is the simple truth and I think it was the way to do it.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Reston.

MR. RESTON: Mr. President, you spoke about compassion as being one of the objectives of your Administration. We have not heard much compassion in New York in relation to the financial plight of the City and I wonder in relation to New York and also to the eight million people now unemployed in the October figures, what do you think of the political and social consequences of a stern view towards those two problems?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we have had a stern view at all toward the unemployed. This Administration has advocated and supported a very significant extension of unemployment benefits. I believe they went from 26 weeks to 65 weeks at the present time.

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We fully supported those extensions under these adverse economic times and we have fully supported the so-called CETA program, or public service program, fully funding those programs that give gainful employment at the local level for people who are otherwise unemployed.

In the case of New York City the issue is more fundamental and it is my understanding that a potentially better solution than a Federal action is possible right now because in New York City the Governor and the mayor, and the bankers, and the representatives from the labor unions are working to try and find an answer without any Federal intervention, without a Federal authority in effect being the mayor.

I think this is in the best interest of the eight million people in New York City. That is the way to solve the problem, not by Federal intervention.

MR. RESTON: Mr. President, can the United States really stand the possibility that you may be wrong about New York?

THE PRESIDENT: I have carefully considered that. I have gotten advice not only from experts in my Administration but I have read considerably about the views of others and it is, I think, the weight of evidence that if New York City unfortunately goes into default, there will not be any serious ramifications in the money markets of this country.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Will.

MR. WILL: Mr. President, based on your knowledge of Ronald Reagan personally, his political philosophy and his record as Governor of the largest State for two terms, is he qualified to be President?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I ought to be the judge of that. I think the voters in the primaries in the first instance will be the judges of that. I don't like to either be critical on the one hand or praising on the other. I have to look at it from my point of view, which is my record and my aims and ambitions. I think it would be unwise for me to comment one way or another on that. As far as I know, he first had a tough decision in California and did a good job. To go beyond that, I don't think I ought to.

MR. WILL: In those primaries you are going to have to tell the voters why, on the basis of what specific issues, they should vote for you instead of Mr. Reagan. Are there differences between your view of the world and Mr. Reagan's?

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THE PRESIDENT: I am going to speak affirmatively in those primaries where I campaign. I will talk about my record. That is the way I always ran a campaign. I was never under any circumstances critical of an opponent. I don't think that is the way to sell yourself to the voters in this country.

MR. WILL: Without being critical, can you point to a political difference between you and Mr. Reagan?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe there is a fair degree of unanimity. I am in the middle of the road. He may be somewhat to the right, but on many basic issues we have a considerable degree of unanimity.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Broder.

MR. BRODER: Mr. President, two or three short questions on domestic issues: The Senate Democratic leaders are coming down to see you tomorrow on the New York City problem. Tip O'Neill says on the basis of knowing you for 24 years that you will sign the kind of bill the House is preparing. Is he right or wrong?

THE PRESIDENT: The bill I have seen that is only out of a subcommittee I think is not the right kind of legislation to solve the problems of New York City.

MR. BRODER: The House and Senate conferees have finished up a new version of an energy bill. Does it look like the kind of legislation you can sign?

THE PRESIDENT: The version I understand they tentatively completed Friday night puts more and more emphasis on imported foreign oil. If I find that to be the case, I don't believe that I can approve it. With several changes -- and I hope they will make them -- we can probably come to an agreement but as it stands now on its tentative basis, I think it presents some problems because there is more dependence on foreign oil than I think is right for this country.

MR. BRODER: Now on the tax bill matter you have on the table a threat to veto any tax cut that is not accompanied by a pledge of a spending cut. In view of the most recent economic statistics showing the economy up and economic indicators down, can you really afford to veto an extension of the tax cut?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe I can because it is equally important, Mr. Broder, to get a handle on the excessive growth of Federal spending. That is as important as a tax reduction and I think the two must be coupled because if we don't do something affirmatively about the growth in Federal spending and get a tax cut at the same time, then I think this country could have worse economic circumstances than we have at the present time.

MR. SPIVAK: I must interrupt briefly. We will continue this special edition of Meet the Press shortly after these announcements.

(Commercial)

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MR. SPIVAK: This is Lawrence Spivak inviting you to the second half of the special edition of Meet the Press with the President of the United States.

Again today on this 28th television anniversary of Meet the Press with the President of the United States, Gerald R. Ford.

Interviewing the President are Bill Monroe of NBC News, James E. Reston of the New York Times, George F. Will of the National Review and David S. Broder of the Washington Post.

We will continue our interview shortly but first this message from our alternate sponsor.

(Commercial)

MR. SPIVAK: We are ready now for the second half of our interview with the President of the United States. We will continue the questions with Mr. Monroe.

MR. MONROE: Mr. President, you said the other day that you knew a fellow who was going to enter every primary. Who could that be?

THE PRESIDENT: Bill, I think in all honesty I was speaking about myself. I am going to enter every primary. That doesn't mean I will campaign in every primary. I firmly believe in the sovereignty of the voters. I think it is an obligation of candidates to present themselves to the voters. I don't understand those who enter some primaries and duck others. I believe that if I enter every primary, then we will get some test of public sentiments.

But more importantly, I want to emphasize that whatever campaigning I do will be secondary to the responsibilities that I have as President. Being President will override any activity in the political arena.

MR. MONROE: Were you suggesting a moment ago that if Mr. Reagan enters the New Hampshire primary, he should enter in Massachusetts as well?

THE PRESIDENT: I said affirmatively, Bill, I think candidates ought to present themselves to the people. They are the ones that should judge. And entering some and ducking others I don't think gives to the American people the options that they ought to have.

MR. MONROE: Mr. President, money is reportedly coming in very slowly for your campaign and Mr. Reagan is supposed to be quite strong in the first two primary States. Your Finance Chairman quit the other day, apparently bothered about Mr. Schlesinger leaving the Government. Wouldn't you concede that you have some concern over where your campaign stands?

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THE PRESIDENT: Frankly, it could be better. Dave Packard, I think, will continue on, as helpful as he can be. He didn't realize that that job was really a full-time position. We, of course, expect some ups and downs in any political campaign but so long as we keep a firm and steady hand on the tiller, which I think we have, I believe the success of our programs, both at home and abroad, will be more determining of the end result than some person not being able to carry on as he indicated he could or would. The voters of this country will make the final decision on the basis of success or failure of the programs that we espouse.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Reston.

MR. RESTON: Following up on Bill's question, Mr. President, are you saying that you are going to leave the question of what happens in this campaign to the people at the primary level, that you would pull out if you were rejected or ran behind Reagan in the primaries?

THE PRESIDENT: I expressed very firmly in Massachusetts the other day, Scotty, that I was going to enter every primary. I indicated today I may not be able to campaign in every primary but I said very specifically in Massachusetts that I will be in the contest at the Republican Convention in August in Kansas City. I think that is a pretty clear statement -- there will be no withdrawal by me.

MR. RESTON: I have two other questions about procedure at the Convention.

Going back to the time when Franklin Roosevelt died, when we looked at the photographs after his death during the campaign in '44, it was perfectly clear that he was a dying man. Since that time there has been great talk about whether or not the country should know far more about the physical health of candidates. My first question is whether you would approve of all candidates submitting themselves to an outside objective medical test before they go to the convention?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Reston, I would have no objection personally under any circumstances. I have excellent medical health, I am proud of it and I would have no objection as far as I am concerned to having such an examination conducted for me and I think it might be very constructive for all others.

MR. RESTON: The second question has to do with the timing of letting us know your preference for a Vice President. You run as a team but usually, over the last few elections at least, we get Vice Presidents picked in the turmoil of the convention. Is there anything to the proposition that the people have the right to know before you are nominated who is going with you, or who your preference would be?

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THE PRESIDENT: I think there is some merit to that but the question is how soon. I have been at several Republican conventions and watched a few Democratic conventions. I think the way it has been done in the past is not necessarily the best way. It has been done in several instances sort of at the last minute and I have been distressed about that. Perhaps we can find a way earlier than the last minute to indicate to the convention delegates and to the American people that I would favor one over another, but we haven't focused in on just how that might be achieved.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Will.

MR. WILL: President Ford, I have here a copy of a June 26 memo sent to the White House to Brent Scowcroft from the office of Secretary Kissinger concerning the question of whether at that time you should meet with Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the memo advises against that meeting saying, and I quote, "not only would a meeting with the President offend the Soviets," the memo goes on to add, "such a meeting would lend weight to his (Solzhenitsyn's) political views."

Does worrying about that type of Kremlin sensitivity the sort of thing you and your advisers feel you have to do in the name of detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe that that is a significant aspect of carrying on or the defeat of detente. There are much broader, more important issues than that. The principal ones, of course, are trade, SALT, a wide variety of very basic issues and those are the issues that we fundamentally focus in on, not on that particular one.

MR. WILL: But is this memo evidence of the fact you did worry about offending the Soviet Union when you decided not to see Mr. Solzhenitsyn?

THE PRESIDENT: It was not a worry as to the undercutting of detente. As you know, subsequently I did indicate after further consideration that I would welcome Mr. Solzhenitsyn at the Oval Office. Unfortunately, that didn't take place. The initial reaction was not related to detente as an undercutting of it, it was a decision made at that time for various reasons and I did re-consider it and we did offer to see him.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Broder.

MR. BRODER: Mr. President, there have been a number of indications yesterday -- I mean in recent days -- that your predecessor would like to return to a role in public life. You have a special responsibility in his status since your pardon spared him, as we now know, from the likelihood of an indictment. Do you think it is appropriate or useful for Mr. Nixon to take up a role in public life in this country?

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THE PRESIDENT: First, I have no indication that he is going to take such a role. I think under the circumstances an active role would not be either in his best interest or on a broader basis. But that is his decision, certainly not mine.

MR. BRODER: Would you consider giving him any role, substantive or ceremonial, in the Ford Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: I see no possibility of that.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, at your press conference the other day you said you were happy, I think that was your word, and optimistic about your nomination and election to the Presidency in 1976. Can you tell us on what you base your optimism in view of the state of our economy and, to a certain extent, the state of our foreign affairs?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Spivak, as I said earlier, I honestly believe that there has been a restoration of credibility and confidence in the White House. That is something that I don't believe any other candidate can take away from me.

The real problems we face relate to performance. I inherited a deteriorating economic condition in this country. We have turned it around and we are coming out of the recession. I believe that we will have a long-range down trend in unemployment. I believe we will have a better record as far as the rate of inflation so that the end result will be in 1976 economic conditions will be better and the net result is under past elections the person who is in office gets the benefit of that.

I do disagree with you that there is a deterioration of our foreign policy. Our foreign policy has been a good one. We just were the principal factors in working with Israel and Egypt in achievement of the Sinai agreement. We have strengthened NATO, we are continuing good programs and good relations with the Soviet Union and China, relations between the United States and Japan have never been better. I think the American people will judge in 1976 on performance and I honestly feel that performance over that period of time will be good.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, on the matter of relations with the Soviet Union, SALT II seems to have been stalled. What I would like to ask you is if there is a sharp difference of opinion and considerable confusion in this country about the meaning and intention of detente with the Soviet Union. Will you give us your definition of detente and tell us what it means to you and what it should mean to the American people?

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THE PRESIDENT: I am not sure that is the best word but that is the word that is being used. Detente means to me that two super powers who are strong militarily and economically, who represent differing political and governmental views, instead of confronting one another can consult one another on a wide variety of areas of potential dispute, whether it is trade, whether it is military potential conflict, whether it is a number of other things.

Now, detente is not always going to mean that we solve every problem, because some of them are very complex and very controversial. It does mean it is a mechanism for the relaxation of tension so that instead of glaring at one another and opening the potential of conflict, you can sit down and discuss differences of opinion and hope to accomplish a relaxation and progress without military conflicts.

MR. SPIVAK; Mr. Monroe.

MR. MONROE: Mr. President, a recent study showed that people who are unemployed suffer psychological damage, even after they find jobs, they are left with a sense of bitterness, alienation, a sense that the system doesn't want them. They are, to an extent, radicalized. Now, can we keep on having unemployment in the neighborhood of 8 percent or 7 percent or 6 and a half percent for years? Isn't there an argument for the Government to do something about providing jobs?

THE PRESIDENT: I have been very proud of the attitude and feelings of the American people who have been, unfortunately, unemployed. They have shown great restraint and understanding. In order to help them, we have extended unemployment benefits, as I indicated earlier, to 65 weeks. We have done a number of other things to help people over this unfortunate situation in which they find themselves. I believe that this excellent attitude that the American people who have been unemployed is a reflection of the strength of our people and the faith that they will have, and if we move up in employment as we have, we have 1,800,000 more people gainfully employed today than we had six months ago. There is a growing optimism. Now the unemployment figures we have today are far too high but the trend is right and this gives encouragement, I think, to people who understand there is no quick fix and some of the programs that are aimed to solve this problem would lead us into the same trap we have had before -- short-term benefits and long-term losses. And the American people are smarter today than they ever have been in knowing that those kinds of programs are not right for the country.

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MR. MONROE: Mr. President, have you had a chance since you have been President to sit down and talk with persons who are unemployed?

THE PRESIDENT: I have had a few individually and from time to time I have been at the White House Conferences around the country, some ten, where individuals who represent the unemployed have been able to ask me questions and to solicit answers, so, in effect, I have had a communication with either individuals in a limited number of cases or with those that represent them, so I think I have gotten their views and gotten an understanding of their problem.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Reston.

MR. RESTON: Mr. President, in the early days of the Republic, the American people took great chances on young men in the Presidency. Now here we are looking at '76 and most of the leading candidates are old geezers like me, in their sixties. Now we seem to have misplaced a generation here somewhere. Is the system out of phase, what explains this?

THE PRESIDENT: I think age is a state of mind and, obviously, a state of health. I am in the early sixties, I feel as vigorous mentally and physically as I ever have at any time in my life. I don't think you should rule a person out just because they are my particular age. On the other hand, I don't think you should rule out a younger person who by experience or intelligence or overall capability is a potential candidate. I don't think you should categorize people just by age bracket. I believe you ought to look at the person, how strong he is mentally and physically and what his experience and what his background is in. That is the criteria I would use.

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MR. RESTON: I agree with that, of course, but my question was whether something had happened, that there seems to be the draft choices of the young guys are not very good these days.

THE PRESIDENT: We have some younger people, Mr. Reston, who are running in the Democratic race for the Presidency and we have some excellent potential younger people who are interested either in the Vice Presidency or even potentially in the Presidency, if they so indicate.

I think we have people that are interested, some Governors, some other officials within and without the Federal Government.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Will.

MR. WILL: Mr. President, the Vladivostok agreement limits the U.S. and the Soviet Union each to 2,400 strategic vehicles. That includes missiles and bombers. Studies done within our Government indicate that the Soviet Union's backfire bombers are capable of taking off from Soviet bases and bombing U.S. cities. Is it your firm position that each Soviet backfire bomber should be counted against that Soviet total of 2,400?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe I should discuss one of the most controversial issues in the negotiations with the Soviet Union. The backfire is a weapons system that has a potential, although there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not its primary mission is one of intercontinental bombing. It is a very difficult decision among several others and I don't believe that with the importance of those negotiations that I should make a categorical statement on this program as to how we might handle the problem of the backfire.

MR. WILL: Is it a fair inference from the fact you won't take a firm position on that, that that is a position we are willing to negotiate a way?

THE PRESIDENT: There are a number of other issues of equal importance where there might be some trade-off -- I am not saying there will be -- but there are some very complicated problems and the backfire is one of them. But for me to make a decision here and to make an announcement on this program, I think, would not be the proper way for a President to handle these very sensitive negotiations.

MR. SPIVAK: We have less than three minutes.

Mr. Broder.

MORE

MR. BRODER: Just to follow up on that, Mr. President, is SALT negotiations in a state that you have had to give up your hope of having a summit meeting with Mr. Brezhnev this year?

THE PRESIDENT: There is far less likelihood that we will have a summit meeting this year. We are continuously negotiating here and with the group of technicians, but the timetable doesn't look encouraging for 1975. I don't think that is necessarily bad.

Under no circumstances do I feel under pressure to get an agreement at a date certain. I want a good agreement rather than to be pressured into having an agreement by a precise date, and it seems to me that we are making headway slowly--very complex, very complicated problems -- and Mr. Will brought up one of the most difficult ones.

We have to work at it because a SALT II agreement is in the best interest of this country and the Soviet Union and the world at large but we are not going to be pressured to get a bad agreement by a date certain.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. President, you said you want a \$395 billion budget ceiling for fiscal 1977 in order to give the American people a \$28 billion tax cut. Is it certain now you will send Congress a \$395 billion budget for 1977, or is that figure still subject to change?

THE PRESIDENT: The decision I made on \$395 billion for fiscal year 1977 is firm. We are in the process right now of refining the details but I must add, Mr. Spivak, that a \$395 billion spending ceiling is not a cutback. It is only a reduction in the growth of Federal spending of \$28 billion. If we don't put a ceiling of \$395 billion, you are going to have the Congress spending at least \$28 billion more for a \$50 billion growth in Federal spending in 12 months and that is unconscionable.

MR. SPIVAK: I am sorry to interrupt but our time is up. Thank you, Mr. President, for being with us today on Meet the Press.

THE PRESIDENT: Larry, may I conclude by congratulating you on your 28 years of Meet the Press by television and your 30-year history of handling Meet the Press, going back to the days of radio.

It has been my privilege to be on this program -- this is the seventh time. It has been a challenge. It has always been pleasant. It has been something that I have enjoyed, as I am sure all other participants have, and we are all, those who have sat in this seat, deeply grateful for your contribution to the understanding of the problems and the people and I thank you on behalf of all who have gone before me.

MORE

MR. SPIVAK: Thank you, Mr. President, for your very generous remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: I should have thanked the panel, too.

MR. SPIVAK: Thank you. It has been a great experience.

I will tell you about next week's guest in just a minute, after this message.

(Commercial)

MR. SPIVAK: Next week on Meet the Press in our regular time period, our guest will be Governor George Wallace of Alabama.

Now a personal word. As you have heard, today is my last Meet the Press program as producer and moderator. After 28 years on television and even more on radio, I am retiring from the program. Before I retire I want to thank those of you in our audience who have supported the program over the years with both criticism and encouragement. I want also to thank our staff and technical crew who contributed so much and whose credits you will soon see.

NBC has placed Meet the Press in capable hands. Bill Monroe will be executive producer and a regular member of the panel. He is a first rate journalist with a well-earned reputation for fairness and responsibility. Betty Cole Cukert will be the producer. She has been my associate for 18 years and has contributed much to the success of Meet the Press. I commend them both.

I may be back for an occasional guest appearance. Until then, this is Lawrence Spivak saying thank you and goodbye for myself, for President Ford and Meet the Press.

END (AT 12:30 P.M. EST)