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THE WHITE HOUSE

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
WITH THE PRESIDENT

BALLROOM NORTH
MARRIOTT MOTOR HOTEL

5:01 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. Will you all sit down.

This is a new format, the first press conference just for the local press, and I am looking forward to it.

Mr. Merriner, will you ask the first question?

QUESTION: Jim Merriner, the Atlanta Constitution.

Will Rogers Morton take an active role in your campaign, and will Bo Callaway's role be downgraded in substance, if not in his actual title?

THE PRESIDENT: First, Bo Callaway has been doing a fine job, and he will continue as he has been. Rogers Morton is Secretary of Commerce. As long as he holds that post, he will have no official responsibilities with the President Ford Committee.

When he leaves the post on or about February 1, he has said he would like to help in any capacity where he can be helpful, but under no circumstances that I foresee would he do anything more than a part-time aid in that area.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Secretary of State, saying he was acting on your orders today, was cited by the House Intelligence Committee for refusing to divulge certain documents. What is your reaction?

THE PRESIDENT: The Pike Committee in the House of Representatives several days ago made a demand for a very substantial number of documents. They wanted, for example, in this area documents from 1962 to 1972, documents which included recommendations from previous Secretaries of State to then Presidents.

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They requested, for example, recommendations from a number of departments through the 40 Committee, which is our intelligence covert activity group that recommends to Presidents actions a President would approve or disapprove.

On the advice of the Attorney General, after thoroughly analyzing the documents requested, the Attorney General has advised me to exercise Executive privilege, which I have.

QUESTION: Do you expect him to be cited by the full Congress and be indeed fined and sent to prison?

THE PRESIDENT: I wouldn't speculate on what the House of Representatives might do, but we have taken this action with reluctance. But, it is important to preserve Executive privilege where recommendations are made by top officials to a President, and I regret very, very much that the committee has taken this action.

I think it is shocking. I think it has very broad and serious ramifications. Over a period of five months, I have tried to cooperate with that committee, giving them tremendous amounts of material, a very substantial number of documents in order to cooperate, but in this case, it doesn't involve my Administration. It involves the period from 1962 to 1972.

I think it is wrong and, therefore, to protect the confidentiality of recommendations from previous Secretaries of State to previous Presidents, I have exercised Executive privilege.

QUESTION: Thank you, and to identify myself, I am Gloria Lane from WSB television.

QUESTION: Craig Lesser, WBHF, Cartersville.

Sir, considering Governor Carey's latest proposals, as well as the serious possibilities of defeat in the New York City primary, to what extent do you support Secretary Simon's latest proposal for aid to New York?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me clear up one thing. I don't think there is a primary in New York. I expect to get very substantial support in New York State when they make the decision at the convention.

The situation in reference to New York is precisely this: Based on the factual situation, I have not changed my decision and have not agreed for any bail-out from New York City. For the first time we have in writing things that the State of New York, the City of New York, the investors and labor organizations have agreed to, but as of this moment, nothing factually has been done.

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One of the matters that they must do, of course, is to re-enact a piece of legislation that permits cities and municipalities to extend maturity dates and to reduce interest rates on certain obligations.

That legislation, I am told, has not yet been enacted. It is, in effect, a procedure under State law that is somewhat comparable to a Federal bankruptcy procedure. But, on the basis of the facts now, there is no change in my position.

We are analyzing the documents received from Governor Carey. We will consult with others. I am encouraged. But, until we have analyzed, until they have acted, there is absolutely no change in my position.

QUESTION: Consider if the legislation is passed, as Governor Carey has suggested yesterday?

THE PRESIDENT: There are a number of other things that have to be done. They have to agree to raise their taxes, city and State. They have to agree to reduce expenditures quite substantially.

Investors have to agree to extend maturities and to reduce interest rates. Labor organizations have to renegotiate the pension plans that have been in effect.

This is a series of steps that must be taken. If and when they are done, of course, we will take another look at it. It is perfectly conceivable, with all of those constructive steps, they might be able to handle their seasonal financing without any Federal intervention.

But, there is a long way to go. We have it on paper, they have promised, but we don't have any action at the present time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Bill Cotterell with United Press International.

Sir, what qualities are you looking for in a Supreme Court Justice? How much have you narrowed down the last, and does it include any Democrats, women, Southerners or members of your Cabinet? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: I am looking for the best person, the best person qualified. We have a preliminary list that the Attorney General has put together. I have asked a number of people to suggest names and a number of people have made such suggestions.

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They are being communicated to the Attorney General. He will consult with the Bar. Their observations will certainly be considered by me.

The list could be quite comprehensive, but until it is submitted to me as a firm list by the Attorney General after this consultation process, I can't make any determination who will be on it and who won't be on it.

But, we are trying to expedite it because it is vitally important that the vacancy on the Court be filled as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: How quickly do you think you can do it?

THE PRESIDENT: I hesitate to put a deadline, but I can assure you we are trying to maximize the speed because the Court does need a full nine-member membership. They have some very serious cases coming before it, and I would hope that within three weeks at the most we would have some names submitted to the United States Senate.

QUESTION: Katherine Johnson, Associated Press.

Mr. President, you said today in New York that you would consider the possibility of Senator Edward Brooke running as your Vice Presidential mate in 1976. Do you consider Brooke a serious contender, and would a black enhance your chances of winning the election?

THE PRESIDENT: I was asked by one of the students at North Carolina Central University, was there anyone in the minority group who I would consider, and I readily said Senator Edward Brooke, a man of experience, integrity and certainly an outstanding Member of the United States Senate.

I don't rule out anyone. The field is wide open since the Vice President withdrew. At the proper time, I will make a specific recommendation. I am simply saying Senator Brooke is certainly a person, among many others, who ought to be considered.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mike Christenson, the Atlanta Journal.

How can you possibly benefit politically from deregulation of the trucking industry as you proposed?

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THE PRESIDENT: If the trucking industry has been over-regulated as far as the consumer is concerned and they have a competitive advantage over other forms of transportation, I think some deregulation is called for.

The recommendations made to me, which I submitted to the Congress yesterday, are carefully thought out. We have not only analyzed what has been done under the ICC over a period of time, we have consulted with the trucking industry and we have consulted with the labor organizations related to trucking.

We think that this is a bona fide, legitimate area for some deregulation, and I think it will benefit the consumer. I think it will improve and strengthen the trucking industry. Therefore, I strongly favor what we have submitted.

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QUESTION: Do you think this will help you politically?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it will because there are elements in the trucking industry, there are consumers who deal with the trucking industry who are very supportive of this. So I think on balance, first it is right and, if something is right I think it is politically beneficial.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Nick Taylor, WXIA-TV, Atlanta.

Returning to the Supreme Court for a moment, what sort of philosophical make-up would you like to see in the Supreme Court when you fill the seat vacated by Justice Douglas?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it is appropriate to start discussing such characteristics as philosophical views or other criteria that might be used. I want the best person to fill that vacancy that I can possibly get and I think it is premature and unwise to draw a prescription because everybody then will take a person and relate it to that prescription. I would rather have the names submitted. I will analyze them and I will submit one name. But I think it is unwise to draw up a prescription at this time.

QUESTION: Would you expect the Court, once your appointment is made, to continue the moves away from the sort of libertarian attitudes espoused by the Warren Court?

THE PRESIDENT: I have felt that the Court has moved somewhat in a direction that I approve in the last several years, yes.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Don Hicks, with WBIE Radio in Atlanta.

My question is, what is your Administration's position in regards to continued funding of revenue sharing and also CETA programs?

THE PRESIDENT: I strongly favor general revenue sharing. About four months ago I requested that Congress renew the present law for a five-year period. Unfortunately, the Congress has not moved in this area as rapidly as I think they should. I hope that mayors, Governors and other local officials will join with me in urging the Congress to extend the present general revenue sharing legislation.

I also favor the CETA legislation, the Comprehensive Education (Employment) and Training Act. I think it is good legislation. I recommended that it be fully funded. I think it was very helpful in the recession that we were in, and I hope that we can continue it in the future.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Shelby McCash, with the Macon Telegraph and News.

One of the candidates for President on the Democratic ticket, Jimmy Carter, by name, is proposing a massive reorganization of the Federal bureaucracy, trimming down Government, I think, by several hundred agencies and bureaus, he claims. If this is a feasible and worthwhile goal, why isn't your Administration taking the initiative to do this?

THE PRESIDENT: He has never submitted such a plan to me -- (Laughter) -- so I am not familiar with the details of it.

We, of course, have been undertaking for the last six months a very broad program to deregulate the American business, the American people. We think this is a big step in the right direction.

I think the biggest danger we fear is not the elimination of agencies -- although I think some can be done away with. I think the biggest danger with this Congress, they want to foist more agencies on the President, and I might say to my good friend, the former Governor, that this Democratic Congress is the one that is trying to add to the agencies, not subtract from them.

QUESTION: But there are a few you believe that could be eliminated? Nothing like 300, however?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that is a slight exaggeration.

QUESTION: Mr. President Beryl Sellers, from the Columbus Ledger-Inquirer.

Recently, the Department of the Army has come out in favor of a one-station training program for soldiers but this program has run into some serious trouble in Congress. I want to ask you, do you favor this program and, if so, what can you do to salvage it?

THE PRESIDENT: That particular recommendation has not come to me from the Department of Defense. In theory, I think it makes sense. You do run into, however, various Members of the House and Senate in those States where a base might be closed or a station eliminated, so that is the problem.

But until the actual recommendation has come to me -- I have not, of course, made a decision.

QUESTION: You have received no recommendation from the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense?

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THE PRESIDENT: That is correct, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Ketcheraid, WSB Radio, Atlanta.

What is your reaction, sir, to the Senate Banking Committee's action just a couple of days ago refusing to confirm Ben Blackburn to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board?

THE PRESIDENT: I think Ben Blackburn would have been a good Chairman of the Home Loan Bank Board. I regret the decision by the Senate Committee. I think he could have and would have performed his responsibilities in a most able way and I think it is unfortunate that the decision was against him 8 to 5.

QUESTION: Do you have any plans to renominate him or perhaps to name him to another Government post?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not had that matter before me since the action by the Senate Committee.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Diane Tannen, WGAC Radio in Augusta.

Some 32 nations abstained on the United Nations' Zionist resolution vote. Are you now reassessing American foreign policy toward these ambivalent countries and, if so, what specific changes can be expected?

THE PRESIDENT: We are, of course, very disappointed with the vote taken in the United Nations. Ambassador Moynihan made a very, very strong speech setting forth the policy of this Government, strongly urging that the United Nations defeat the resolution. I think the United Nations by that resolution has seriously handicapped, at least to some extent, its usefulness. I hope and trust, however, it will realize and understand the ramifications and will not proceed any further in that direction or anything comparable to it.

I do not, however, think that the United States should withdraw from the United Nations just because of the unwise action on this resolution. You can always do better trying to correct something from within than from without.

We have no particular plans for any recriminatory action against any of those 32 nations. We just think they were very wrong.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

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THE PRESIDENT: There was some 70 nations -- excuse me -- that voted that way.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Ron Wilson, Georgia Network, in Atlanta.

What direction are you leaning in now on the energy compromise bill, and are you in favor of extending oil price controls?

THE PRESIDENT: The Energy Conference report was orally agreed to by the Conferees, night before last. I had a two-hour meeting with a number of the Conferees last evening. A number of the Conferees are uncertain as to some of the specifics.

I am reserving judgment on that legislation until the Conferees put the agreements in writing in legislative form. And I am told they won't have that done for about a week.

I would hope we could have an energy bill that I could sign but it would be very unwise for me to make a decision without having looked at and read and analyzed the specifics once the Committee puts it in writing.

But we hope to do that some time next week.

QUESTION: On oil price controls, are you in favor of extending those past this Saturday?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the 30-day extension to give all of us more time -- which the Senate has passed and which the House of Representatives probably will pass today -- I think that is desirable just to give us 30 more days to analyze the Congressional action once they put it in writing. I will sign the 30-day extension.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Walt Smith, United Press International.

How does the entry of Governor Wallace into the Democratic race, his formal entry this week -- how do you think that affects the Democratic race and, specifically, do you think that Governor Wallace will get a spot on the Democratic ticket?

THE PRESIDENT: I am really not an authority on what might or might not happen in the Democratic Party. I know, of course, that in 1972 he ran very well in my State. I think he will probably run very well in my State again in 1976. He will be a factor -- that is perfectly obvious. Whether he will be on the ticket or not, I just don't think I am qualified to give you an answer.

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QUESTION: As a follow-up question, if he decided to go the third party route, do you think that would have a definite effect on the election? Could it throw it into the House of Representatives?

THE PRESIDENT: It is very possible. It almost did in 1968 when I think three or four States, if they had gone one way or another differently, it might have thrown it into the United States House of Representatives.

I think the impact of Governor Wallace running as a third party candidate depends somewhat on the Democratic nominee and we don't know that, of course. So, I don't think I should speculate until we get more information, one, as to whether Governor Wallace is going to be on the Democratic ticket; two, whether he will be a third party candidate, and who the Democratic nominee will be.

Those are uncertainties at the present time.

QUESTION: I am Sarah Lofton with the Southeastern Newspapers.

Governor George Busby is attempting to convince Congress that the Federal Government should allow States to pre-empt a portion of Federal taxes on motor fuel. I just wanted to know what your position is on this.

THE PRESIDENT: I recommended to the Congress several months ago a proposed new highway act, and one of my recommendations was that the Congress should take off one of the cents that is now charged by the Federal Government in the gas tax and turn it over to the States.

I think that would help the States to finance their share of highway construction.

The Congress thus far has not acted on my recommendation. It appears that Governor Busby and myself agree in this regard.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Alma Bowen from the Times in Gainesville, Georgia.

I wanted to ask you about the Tennessee Valley Authority. You have appointed a man on the Board of Directors who is from Mississippi, and I understand he is having problems, or there has been a delay in confirmation of this appointment in the Senate.

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My question is, if this man is not confirmed, would you consider a man from Georgia since some TVA lakes are located here and a lot of citizens up there want a representative from Georgia on the Board of Directors?

THE PRESIDENT: If Mr. Hooper is not confirmed for the TVA Board membership, I will certainly consider qualified individuals from any of the States that are affected by the TVA, including Georgia.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: John Patrick, TV-5 News Scene, WAGA-TV.

Mr. President, Time Magazine this week was highly critical of your dismissal of Messrs. Schlesinger and Colby, labeling it bad management and subverting morale in many Government departments.

Do you consider having your own team more important than the effect of another high-level change in your Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the changes I made, or have recommended, are constructive. I was pleased yesterday that the Senate Committee on Armed Services voted 16 to nothing to approve Don Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense.

I think that is a good indication that he is a highly qualified man and will do a good job. I think George Bush will do the same in the CIA. I believe that Elliot Richardson later, when he replaces Rogers Morton, will be a highly qualified and a good appointee.

I think these are all constructive, and I respectfully disagree with the conclusions as you state them.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you plan any other changes in your Administration very soon?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any Cabinet changes in mind. I think it is fairly well set.

But, I would like to clarify one thing. Again, up in Raleigh, I was asked a question by one of the students relating to the Cabinet, and I said it was set and then somebody raised a question, does this preclude Carla Hills, Bill Coleman, Ed Levi and others from maybe being considered for a United States Supreme Court appointment.

I want to clarify it by saying if I nominated any one of those three, I would think it was a promotion, so it is in a different category than asking someone to resign from the Cabinet. That would be a promotion, and I would not say that I am precluding them from being considered for a Supreme Court appointment.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Charles Hayslett, with the Journal.

Your remarks of a few moments ago suggested a healthy respect for Governor Wallace's political strength. Assuming you win your party's nomination, whom would you rather face in the South -- Governor Wallace or Governor Carter? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: That is a very speculative, hypothetical question, as far as the Democratic nominee is concerned. So I really don't think at this time I am qualified to give you an answer.

QUESTION: Would you take a shot at it? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is so speculative and so hypothetical that I don't really think I should answer it.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Tim Dobbs with WMAZ Radio and Television in Macon, Georgia.

Continuing in the same vein of thought with my newspaper colleague there, there seems to be a great deal more emphasis being placed on the South in the early days of these campaign times, more Presidential candidates than we have seen in some time, more often, yourself, for instance, have been in Georgia three times this year.

Do you feel that the South would possibly be a trigger, or could be the region of the country which could be a deciding factor in the election?

THE PRESIDENT: First, I like Georgians and I like to come to Georgia. Furthermore, the South is a growing, burgeoning part of our country. It is, population-wise, a bigger percentage today than it has been, say, 20 or 30 years ago. It is more significant politically. Therefore, I think that is very understandable that more Presidential candidates are coming to Georgia and to other Southern States.

QUESTION: A follow-up question: One of the Presidential candidates who has not yet said he is a Presidential candidate, Mr. Reagan, was asked about Southern strategy and he said there is no such thing in his view as Southern strategy per se as far as the Presidential election is concerned. Do you agree with that?

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THE PRESIDENT: I have no Southern strategy as such. I have been to, I think, 20-some, almost 30 States. I have traveled here as well as elsewhere in the South. I think it is important to visit as many of the States of the Union as possible but, as far as having a geographical thrust of my campaign, the answer is no. I want to prevail in all 50 States.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Merriner. It is nice to see you all.

END (AT 5:29 P.M. EST)