

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 25

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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Sunday

In the Memorial Union Building
At the University of New Hampshire
Durham, New Hampshire

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. Won't you all sit down and relax.

I have enjoyed being here. Ron Nessen has enjoyed being here. The next time Ron comes, I think we will get Ron to ski up here.

Why don't we have the first question?

QUESTION: Mr. President, John Whiteman, Portsmouth Herald.

A survey in a Boston newspaper today says that Mr. Reagan's campaign has contacted more New Hampshire voters than yours, and it suggested the Ford campaign has been out-organized so far.

In an apparently tight race, do you feel the 16 days remaining is sufficient for you to swing enough voters to win this New Hampshire primary campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe in the final analysis the voters in New Hampshire will make a decision on the basis of policies. The policies that I have implemented, the policies that have proven successful, as far as our economy is concerned, turning it around, starting it up on an upswing.

I don't think they will make their decision on the basis of promises or rhetoric.

Secondly, I think our organization is a good organization. I met with seven or eight hundred, maybe more, this afternoon in Concord, extremely enthusiastic, coming from all over the State, and they have done a good job and they will do a good job.

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It is my impression the many times I have been to New Hampshire in the past -- not just in the last month -- will have an impact because of the numerous times I have been in New Hampshire over the last ten or 15 years, I have acquired many friends, many individuals who believe in my policies, so I am not just coming in for a last-minute effort.

I have a vast reservoir of good friends here that I have made over the years, including, I think, three times in 1975. So, ours is not a last-minute effort like some campaigns have been. I have policies that are on the record, and I don't have to say I would do this hypothetically.

So, our efforts in the last several days I think have been a good climax to what we have done over a great many years.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Niles Clevesy, Plymouth State College.

Mr. President, in a February 5 Manchester Union Leader article entitled "Action Irks Governor," New Hampshire Governor Meldrim Thomson, Jr., severely criticized your Administration for the ruling by the Atomic Energy Safety Licensing Board which would delay the proposed nuclear energy plant at Seabrook.

The Governor blames the Board for freezing nearly 3,000 badly needed construction jobs in the State, and charges that the delay of the nuclear plants construction is costing the electric-consuming public \$10 million a month.

As I understand it, Mr. President, you called for construction of 200 major nuclear plants by 1985 in the United States. Would you care to comment on both Governor Thomson's charges and how the constant delays in awarding the permits to Seabrook affect your deadline for 1985 for such plants?

THE PRESIDENT: Under the laws passed by Congress, a nuclear regulatory commission has been established. It has the sole jurisdiction to make a decision as to any applicant and any protest made concerning that applicant. Any interference by a President of the United States in that process would be unethical and illegal.

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This President doesn't intend to participate in any unethical or illegal pressure on the Nuclear Regulatory Administration.

That agency, or that commission, will make a decision and will make it on the facts. I think it has taken too long, but that is their responsibility.

As you indicated, I am a firm advocate of many, many more nuclear power plants in the United States. In January of 1975 in my State of the Union Message, I said it was mandatory that the United States undertake the construction of some 200 additional nuclear powered plants all over the United States in order to free us from the oil cartels in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, that program has been slow in materializing. There have been some questions raised as to reliability and safety of some of those nuclear power plants.

In order to make certain that power plants built in the future are safe, are reliable, I have recommended in the budget for fiscal year 1977 substantial additional funds for the Energy Research and Development Agency, called ERDA.

I think we can still meet the goal of 200 nuclear power plants throughout the United States, and a fair proportion in the State of New Hampshire.

But, I repeat, this President is not going to undertake any unethical or illegal pressure on any independent regulatory agency in the Federal Government. It would be wrong, and I don't intend to do it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Allen Bridges, WKBR Radio.

When Secretary Coleman announced his decision this past week on the Concorde, is that not an indication your Administration is turning its back on environmentalists?

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THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. Anyone who has read Secretary Coleman's very sizable opinion granting temporary authority for 16 months under very tightly prescribed conditions, they cannot land or take off before 7 a.m. in the morning and they cannot land or take off after ten o'clock in the evening, and there can only be a very limited number of flights per week. And in the meantime, he reserves to himself the total authority to stop any flights if there are any violations of his particular order.

In addition, he has urged the British and the French and the United States to undertake a comprehensive coordinated effort to study the problems of the ozone.

Many environmentalists have raised theoretical problems as to the impact of Concorde's flying at the speed and at the level as it might affect the ozone. I think Secretary Coleman has written a very excellent, constructive decision, and if this 16-month trial period is carried out, as I believe it will, it will give us some very important information that will permit us to make a final decision.

And I would like to add a postscript. The very limited number of supersonic aircraft that will be flying the so-called Concorde flights are a miniscule number of the total number of military supersonic aircraft that are flying around the world every day.

But nevertheless, we ought to do what Secretary Coleman suggested, 16-month trial period, very rigid regulations, very important testing in the process.

I think it was an excellent decision. I fully support it.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Michael Imsick. In view of the many complications in the establishment of a 200-mile ocean fisheries and economic limit such as free shipping, passage, military access, migratory fish species, the presence of our fishing vessels within 200 miles of other countries and inevitable boundary disputes, would you endorse a temporary 200-mile unilateral economic limit until it can be solved through international agreement?

THE PRESIDENT: This Administration has been working very, very hard in the Law of the Sea Conference. We have another meeting of the Law of the Sea Conference in New York in late February or early March.

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We now have a draft paper that is substantial progress which meets in some degree or another all the problems that you raise. It would be very beneficial for the world as a whole to settle the problems of the 200-mile limit, the ownership of seabed minerals, the navigation problems, overflight, on-the-surface use of the sea.

If we could settle all those problems in the Law of the Sea Conference in this meeting that comes up in late February or early March, that would be the best solution. In the meantime, I think it is helpful to have some pressure, if the negotiators dilly dally, don't do something affirmatively, then they ought to recognize the United States feels it is vitally important that we do something to protect not only our game fish but our commercial fish.

Therefore, I have said that we will give you the Law of the Sea Conference through 1976 and some months in 1977 to fish or cut bait. And, if they don't, then the United States ought to move unilaterally.

I feel very strongly that way, and I think the negotiators ought to move and stop haggling and find answers to the problems you are talking.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, David Wysocki, WKXL. You said you feel your strategy of running on your record plus your past experiences here in New Hampshire will be successful here.

I am wondering what if it isn't successful? Will you possibly come back here before the 24th and what would determine that trip, and also taking a step further, suppose you lose in New Hampshire and a couple of the early primaries, will you take the campaign trail more yourself or will you decide that perhaps being President is more important and drop out of the race?

THE PRESIDENT: We are analyzing whether we will or will not come back before the 24th. No final decision has been made. I have been very encouraged by the warm reception, the good results I think that have come from this trip, but we have made no final decision, yet we have another trip as a possibility.

I do expect to first concentrate on being President of the United States. That is a rather full-time job, and I will make that the most important responsibility I have, but on weekends, a time that I think can be taken from that job and do whatever campaigning seems to be desirable, seems to be necessary.

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It will be extra over and above the responsibilities I have as being President.

Let me reiterate something I have said before. I expect to do well in New Hampshire. I think we will do well in some of the other primaries, but I have an old adage that I follow, prepare for the worst because the best will take care of itself.

Now, let me say this, I expect to be a candidate for the nomination of the Republican Party in August in Kansas City. I will be there and whatever happens will have no impact on that. I love a good fight. I will be representing the viewpoints and the record that I have, and I think we are going to win before as well as there.

QUESTION: Sir, to follow that up, please. You say you will be preparing for the worst, but suppose you do lose New Hampshire, Massachusetts and some of the others, that will have some bearing, of course, on what your campaigning further on will be. Will you go out campaigning more on your own?

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THE PRESIDENT: Since I don't anticipate the dire results you are speculating on, I really haven't made any plans to meet that contingency.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Cathy Wolf from the Associated Press.

I would like to follow up on that Seabrook question that was asked earlier. Governor Thomson has said he was told many months ago that one of your top aides had told him that a decision to go ahead with the license would be made by September.

At that time, the NRC Board was still reviewing the entire proposal. Do you know who that aide was, and was such a promise given?

THE PRESIDENT: I do not know who the aide was that gave that alleged information to Governor Thomson. I don't think any aide in the White House would be that knowledgeable to know when and if the Nuclear Regulatory Agency would make a decision by a date certain.

There are always factors that come up during the process of hearings and consideration by an independent agency. I understand there have been one or two new developments involved in the Seabrook nuclear power plant.

Those new developments inevitably cause some delay because even once the decision is made by the nuclear regulatory agencies, unless their decision is fully backed up by the facts, unless their decision totally complies with the law, they, of course -- their decision, it is subject to court involvement.

The worst thing would be for a President or his people to unethically or illegally get involved in that process. That would really slow the matter up.

Now, if a Governor wants to get involved, or somebody on the outside, they do it at their own risk. But this President isn't going to do anything illegal or unethical concerning that project.

I have strong feelings, as I said a moment ago, that we need 200 more nuclear power plants, and I hope the Nuclear Regulatory Agency moves as rapidly as it can on all of them. But, that is their decision, and I am not going to try to tell them how to do it.

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QUESTION: Well, the Governor made this claim a couple of weeks ago. Had you heard about it at all? Had you heard that he said he had been told by an aide?

THE PRESIDENT: I read it in the newspaper, but I don't think that any person on my staff should try to tell the NRC when and how they ought to make the decision.

QUESTION: Will you check out, Mr. President, whether anyone on your staff had had communication with Governor Thomson on this matter?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I will try to do that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Rick Beyer, WDCR-AM.

I would like to know, was your recent change of heart on the Supreme Court ruling on abortion basically a political move to improve your position in New Hampshire and, if not, I would like to know why you feel that a new Constitutional amendment of the kind you advocated for State control of abortion regulations is necessary?

THE PRESIDENT: My decision adverse to the Supreme Court decision goes back some time. I felt at the time the decision was made that it went too far. I publicly expressed that view at that time, and while I was a Member of the House of Representatives after that decision, I made a decision to oppose the Constitutional amendment that would preclude any Federal Executive, Legislative or Judicial action against abortion, and I felt then -- and it is on the record at that time -- that I favored an amendment that would permit individual State action.

That record was laid out long before I became Vice President or President, so it has no application whatsoever to the current situation.

QUESTION: Why do you think such an amendment is necessary?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that it would be very helpful in clarifying and giving to the individual State -- we have 50 States, and if they want to make a decision one way or the other, if you believe in States rights, I think it is a very proper, very logical conclusion.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Fred Kocher from WMUR-TV, Manchester, New Hampshire.

The Federal District Court in Concord just recently here in New Hampshire ruled that a State law here in New Hampshire allowing voluntary prayer in public schools was patently unconstitutional.

My question to you is, do you agree with that kind of court decision, because there are people in this State and in many States that feel that voluntary prayer is a basic Constitutional right.

THE PRESIDENT: Some years ago there was a United States Supreme Court decision as to whether or not a woman in Baltimore, as I recollect, who had a child who objected to the nondenominational prayer that was conducted in that community.

That court decision in effect said there could be no prayer in public schools in the United States.

I read that decision very carefully. I read the dissenting opinion of Justice Potter Stewart very carefully.

I subscribe to Justice Potter Stewart's dissenting opinion and, therefore, I disagree with the Supreme Court decision which precludes nondenominational prayers in public schools.

I agree with the Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who said the court was wrong.

So, I regret the court decision. I agree with the minority, and I think it is most unfortunate that under reasonable limitations, I think it is regrettable that under reasonable limitations there can't be nondenominational prayer in public schools.

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QUESTION: What course of action would you suggest at this point, let's say, to the Congress or to any group who disagreed, like you do?

THE PRESIDENT: The most extreme course of action would be a Constitutional amendment. When this matter came up, I was the Republican Minority Leader in the House, and Senator Everett Dirksen was the Republican Minority Leader in the Senate. He was a firm advocate of a Constitutional amendment to remedy this situation.

I talked with him many, many times about it because that was one thing he wanted to do because he felt so strongly about it. In the process of our discussions with him, I subscribed to an amendment of that kind.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mike D'Antonio. Any cuts in aid to education may make entrance to universities impossible for low and middle-income people who cannot pay the entire bill without assistance. Will you please comment on that?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the primary responsibility for the financing of a State university comes from the State itself. These are State universities, and the funding for the faculty, for the facilities should, of course, come as a major responsibility of the State.

Now, the Federal Government does put in a very substantial amount of funding in several ways. One, the Federal Government finances a great deal of research and developments in college laboratories. It puts a great deal of money into State and private universities all over the country for basic research, for applied research.

The other approach that the Federal Government does is to give to students who want to attend a university significant financial assistance. In the budget that I recommended for fiscal year 1977, I proposed a billion, one hundred million dollars for the Basic Opportunity Grants program to help students all over the country so that they would have financial resources so they could go to colleges and universities throughout the United States.

This program is focused in on the students who are in need. Now, we have a number of other individually focused programs for the students. We have this guaranteed loan program, and I have to say parenthetically the repayment rate on those loans has not been very encouraging. But we also have the Work Study Group, or program, where on many, if not all campuses, the Federal Government pays, as I recall, 90 percent of the pay that goes to students who work on the campus doing jobs related to the maintenance and so forth of the campuses.

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This program, when you add it all up, as far as the Federal Government is concerned, will be in the range of around \$2 billion for students, period. And in addition, we have the grant programs for many, many studies conducted on behalf of the Federal Government in universities themselves.

Then we have, I should add, a massive dormitory program for State universities and other universities.

I saw a very substantial facility as I drove in to the campus today. I suspect that is a Federally financed -- although I can't be sure -- but it looks like one of the many all over the United States where the Federal Government puts up the money in effect for the construction of dormitory facilities in many colleges and universities.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you have any new programs in the work to help students who are applying to institutions like the University of New Hampshire where State assistance is low and perhaps they have been cut out by the recent cuts in education funding? Are there any new things aimed at particularly the low and middle-income students?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there are any new programs of that kind. Of course, if we get tax reductions for the middle-income wage earner, the way I proposed, the middle-income wage earner will have more money to help send his son or daughter to a college or university.

There is one other Federal program that I didn't mention. It is a very substantial one. It is the GI bill which costs the Federal Government, I recollect, \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year to send ex-GIs to colleges and universities so they can complete their training based on their 36 months entitlement under the Vietnam War program.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Tim Clark from the New Hampshire Network.

We have seen reports that Treasury Secretary Simon recently proposed privately to you that the Federal income tax system be simplified by doing a way with all tax deduction and lowering income tax rates across the board.

First of all, did such a proposal reach your desk? Secondly, what was your response, and if it didn't reach your desk, what would your response to such a proposal be?

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THE PRESIDENT: Secretary Simon has talked to me in generalities about a Federal income simplification program. The objective would be to lower income tax rates, but it would take away all or most of the exemptions that are currently in our existing internal revenue code, such as the deduction for contributions to educational institutions, deductions to charitable organizations, and a wide range of other deductions such as those to the United Fund, to the Red Cross, to the rest. That would be the thrust of the proposal made by Secretary Simon. We had a good discussion about it.

I said I would not embrace it. I thought the better way to proceed would be for him and the Treasury Department to study it and then present to me not something orally, but something on paper so that I could analyze it very concretely and very specifically.

I had some experience with a somewhat comparable proposal that I think President Johnson proposed to the Congress eight or nine years ago which, on paper, was a very simple proposal, lowering rates but eliminating virtually, if not all, deductions.

I don't think I got any more mail under any program because every church group, every university, every charitable organization--they didn't want to lose those deductions because that is how we supply the wherewithall for a great many scholarships, a great many worthy projects to help the poor, to help other people in need.

So until Secretary Simon comes to me with a concrete proposal that I can analyze the pros and cons, I am not going to give it the go-ahead sign. If and when that comes, we will make a decision.

QUESTION: Some of the Democratic candidates for President this year are speaking loudly and often about tax reform. If you are not in favor of the Simon proposal, what are your thoughts on reforming the tax system?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think this proposal to which you refer is the kind of reform that some of the Democratic candidates are talking about. They are talking about a wide variety of many other things.

We have sent up through Secretary Simon some specific reductions or loophole closings. They are in part incorporated in the bill that passed the House of Representatives in the last session that is now before Senator Long's Senate Committee on Finance. Even though that "reform bill" has some things in it we don't approve of, it does have some we recommended.

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So depending on what the Senate does, I will have to make a decision. I would hope that Senator Long's committee in the Senate would make some modifications. If they do, we could embrace a tax reform bill.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Marc Capobianco, student paper of Dartmouth College.

As a Congressman your voting was never less than 70 percent in support of Nixon's policies. As Vice President, you argued for Nixon's programs and staunchly defended him against impeachment. As President you consulted with your predecessor and pardoned him.

How has your Administration definitively distinguished itself in its policies from those of the former President?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think one very significant difference is that we have different people in the vast majority of major offices in the Cabinet, in regulatory agencies, we have a new team in many of the major areas of policy determination and policy direction -- the Cabinet, regulatory agencies, et cetera.

We have followed a very middle-of-the road to conservative view in economic policy. It has been a policy decided by me. I didn't go back and look at what the former President did because he didn't have the hard decisions like we had in 1975.

If there is a similarity, it is pure happenstance. The decisions I made in 1975 were mine predicated on the problems that we faced.

Now, in the field of foreign policy, there is an area of similarity. I believe that SALT I was a good agreement. I believe that if we can get a SALT II agreement, it is in the best interest of this country.

Let me just point out some of the things that will happen if we don't get a SALT II agreement. In the first place, backfire will run free. There won't be any limitations or constraints on it. If we don't get a SALT II agreement, there won't be any definition of a launching weight or throw weight. If we don't get a SALT II, there will be no limitation on launchers or MIRVs after October 1977.

I happen to feel very strongly that SALT I was a good agreement and it is desirable for a good agreement for SALT II. If that is a similarity that you are complaining about, I think it is a similarity that is worthy of support. Where we are similar, fine; where we differ, it is just one of the differences that are likely to take place.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Ron Amadon from WGIR Radio in Manchester.

Would you accept Ronald Reagan as your Vice President?

THE PRESIDENT: I said I guess a month ago that that was within the realm of possibility. But, I also said quite recently there is a long list of very able United States Senators, present Governors, other public officials who certainly ought to be considered. Any former Governor, I think, certainly would qualify for consideration.

QUESTION: If I may follow up on that, sir, would you agree to debate Mr. Reagan during the primary campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see any real necessity for it. I have a record. I cast 4,000 votes in the House of Representatives in 25 years on Federal issues. I have been President for 18 months. The public knows what my record is. If they want to compare it to the rhetoric or the words of former Governor Reagan on Federal issues, I think that is a very legitimate study for the American people to make, but I don't think a 30-minute or an hour debate is the preferable way or the better way for the public to find out what the facts are.

They can look at my voting records, and the way I have acted in the White House for the last 18 months, it is on the record, meeting practical problems in a practical way, not with speeches, and they can compare that record with the Governor's record as to what he says he will do and that is a very valid comparison. I don't think that an hour's debate would make any significant difference.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bill Ayedelott, WLTN, Littleton, New Hampshire.

President Ford, this is your second political appearance in New Hampshire in the last six months, the first one being this past September on behalf of the candidacy in the special Senate election of Lou Wyman.

At that time, you were supporting him and his record. He was wholeheartedly supporting you and your Administration. Yet, in the outcome of that election, he suffered quite a stinging defeat in what is generally a Republican State.

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I am wondering whether you feel that, or whether you are just regarding that as a personal loss for him despite your appearance in his behalf, or whether it might be considered a valid indication that quite a number of New Hampshire voters are dissatisfied with your policies?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it proves one thing -- that you can't necessarily translate your own record or your own popularity to another candidate. I am not going to speculate on the impact of that appearance where I was very warmly and very generously received by, I think, over 100,000 people in the short span from nine o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night.

I am not going to speculate whether that warmth and that very generous reception that was given to me in that September day will have an impact on this election or not.

I think the only time we can really see is February 24, and I am quite optimistic.

QUESTION: In a follow up to that, despite that appearance where so many people lined the motorcade and so forth, despite -- well, perhaps not despite, but up to this time you are coming to New Hampshire, many political experts in this State and also within your own organization are saying that the race with Governor Reagan is going to be right down to the wire, an unusually tight situation for an incumbent executive.

I am wondering, as a politician, as a President, from your viewpoint, what is it that Ronald Reagan is saying that seems so attractive to apparently so many New Hampshire voters and what is your response to that?

THE PRESIDENT: I won't comment on what the former Governor has said that seems, under your analysis, helpful to his campaign. I have a record. We can't say one thing and then do another. We have to deal with reality, and we have and acting with reality, we have been successful in turning the economy around, being successful in foreign policy.

When the chips are down, I think the people will want a proven quality rather than one who hasn't had those hard decisions to make or those difficult actions to take. I will just wait until February 24.

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QUESTION: Jerry Vaillancourt, WFEA in Manchester.

Mr. President, a number of supporters of yours, both locally and from across the country, have come to New Hampshire to criticize Ronald Reagan on such topics as his proposed \$90 billion Federal budget reduction plan, his stand on the equal rights amendment, the status of cities in California when he was Governor, but the campaign between the two of you has been rather squeaky clean, if I may say.

Do we have any reason to assume that what the supporters of your candidacy here in New Hampshire say against Ronald Reagan are really echoing what you really believe or what you would like to say?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think you can get into a political debate and have it at a right level if you indulge in personalities. I certainly never have, and I never will. I hope that the people that have represented me, or been interested in my candidacy, have asked factual questions, have raised legitimate factual issues.

There are plenty that ought to be raised.

I have often wondered over my experience in politics -- and I ran 13 times for re-election, or 12 times for re-election, once against an incumbent -- and I always believed and I believe today that when you apply for a job, your prospective employer--in this case, the voters--ought to look at your record.

What is wrong with that? When a person applies for a job -- and in this case it is the voters in New Hampshire, and the voters in 49 other States -- those prospective employers ought to look at your qualifications.

My qualifications are on the record, and I think it is a very legitimate experience for the voters here, as well as elsewhere, to see what the record is. Every employer does that, and in New Hampshire you have thousands and thousands of prospective employers. I think it is a very proper thing. Look at the factual record.

QUESTION: What I am trying to drive at, the people who are asking the questions are not the voters, not the prospective employers, but your supporters, your employees, you might say. What the things your supporters are saying, against Mr. Reagan, are they yours?

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THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there has been any serious questioning by them. I understand a number of the New Hampshire State Legislators have raised most of the questions about the \$90 billion proposal. That is what I understood the thrust has come concerning that proposal because those State Legislators, if they don't get the money from the Federal Government for these many programs, they either have to cut out the services to the people of New Hampshire or raise New Hampshire's taxes.

I think those are very legitimate questions by responsible State Legislators.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Ro Chamberlain, WUNH.

Mr. President, in your proposed 1977 budget, why have you given such a low priority to solar energy and energy conservation, allotting only \$91 million for energy conservation out of a \$1 billion 875 million ERDA budget?

THE PRESIDENT: I am very glad you brought that question up. Let's take solar energy to begin with. I may be a million dollars or so off, but in the current fiscal year for solar energy research, Government-wide, it is about \$84 million.

I increased it in the next budget by 35 percent, something over \$120 million. I personally disregarded the recommendations of some of the people in the Administration who wanted to spend less money for solar energy, and I said no.

I personally increased in at least three cases extra research and development money for solar energy. It is the biggest solar energy program in research and development in the history of the United States.

Now, I don't recall precisely the figures for conservation, but on energy research increases across the board, we increased them over -- I increased them, with a submission of my budget -- by 30 percent. That is not bad -- geothermal, exotic fuels, solar, et cetera -- so we actually went beyond what many of the experts told me we ought to do in research and development, in fossil fuels, across the spectrum.

So, for research, for the new things that can be done to produce more energy other than gas and oil, which in the main we get from foreign sources, we have put forth the biggest research and development budget in the history of the country for energy progress.

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QUESTION: But are you still giving more priority to nuclear energy and instead of something like recycling?

THE PRESIDENT: We, quite frankly, did put more money in for nuclear research and development for two reasons. We want to make any nuclear reactors in the future safe, and we want to make them more reliable, and Government research and development is the best way to do it.

That is why we put the extra money in for R and D for nuclear experiments. I think it is a good investment.

QUESTION: Mr. President, my name is Stewart Powell, and I am with UPI.

Can you tell us, please, what are the domestic and international consequences of the change of power in China, and whether you are upset by Nixon's visit there and, thirdly, whether you plan to consult with him personally or have any member of your Administration consult with him when he returns?

THE PRESIDENT: President Nixon, former President Nixon, is going to China as a private citizen. He was invited by the Government of the People's Republic of China. He called me Thursday or Friday, I guess Thursday, and notified me of his invitation from the Chinese and his acceptance.

I am delighted that his health is such that he can go. I asked him to extend to Chairman Mao and the other leaders my very best. We talked generally about his trip in 1972. There is no commitment on his part to report to me or on my part to ask him to report to me.

We will wait and see what happens on his return. Some 10,000 Americans have visited the People's Republic of China in the last three or four years. I think it is wholesome and healthy that private citizens undertake these trips.

I can understand the Chinese. He was very instrumental in helping to open up the relations between our country and their country. There is no political ramification at all. He is going as a private citizen, at their invitation.

I just learned late last night of the new acting Premier in the People's Republic. I have not had an opportunity thus far to get any full report from the experts in the State Department and the intelligence community.

I think it is premature for me to make any comment until I have had the full benefit of the experts in this area.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Murray, Foster's Daily Democrat.

Other than Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, probably the hardest person to keep track of in the Federal Government has been Elliot Richardson. Under the Nixon-Ford Administrations, he has been Ambassador to Great Britain, Secretary of HEW, of Defense and now Commerce.

My question, sir, is, are there specific qualifications for these positions, and if so, has Elliot Richardson, does he and has he had the specific qualifications? And I would also like to know how high up he is on your Vice Presidential candidate list?

THE PRESIDENT: Obviously Secretary of Commerce Richardson has many, many qualifications. Before he came to the Federal Government, he was an Attorney General for the State of Massachusetts. He was also Lieutenant Governor for Massachusetts. He had long had an interest in serving the Federal Government. He had many broad experiences in private life as an attorney. He is a very well educated, a very able, dedicated person.

And the fact that I had confidence in him to send him as our Ambassador to Great Britain, to ask him to come back to be Secretary of Commerce indicates my strong feeling that he is an outstanding public servant.

I mentioned his name the other day among ten or maybe more prospective Vice Presidential candidates. I think that is a clear indication of my additional feeling concerning his capabilities, but to list them or to put him in a certain place on the ladder, I think is premature as far as Vice President is concerned.

QUESTION: Mr. Ford, are there specific qualifications for these top Government positions, and if there are, is Mr. Richardson that versatile to hold these different positions such a short period of time?

THE PRESIDENT: One of the very excellent qualifications he has is excellent administrative responsibility. He has always been known as an outstanding administrator, to get an organization working smoothly with a minimum of red tape, with the best service to the customers, so to speak, the American people. I think everybody would say that he has been and is today an outstanding administrator.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

MORE

QUESTION: Sue Roman, WTSN Radio.

Mr. Zarb was recently in New Hampshire lobbying for the deregulation of interstate natural gas prices, but your critics have charged that this will skyrocket prices, and they also say this is inconsistent with the continued regulation of gasoline and oil prices.

How do you defend this position?

THE PRESIDENT: The answer is very clear. You either deregulate natural gas and get more American natural gas or we buy more foreign oil. It is just that simple.

Now, I happen to think it's better to develop our own resources, and in the long run you won't pay significantly more, and we will not be at the whim and fancy of a foreign oil cartel.

Under the present circumstances, our domestic oil production is going down. Under present circumstances with regulation of natural gas, domestic gas production is going down. And if we don't deregulate natural gas, there will be in a relatively short period of time virtually no domestic natural gas, which means we have to buy more and more foreign oil.

I would rather use our natural gas rather than Arab foreign oil. And, therefore, I strongly feel that the deregulation of American natural gas is in the best interests of this country.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Douglas Cope, WHEB Radio.

Mr. President, there have been reports that the Soviet Union is using radiation listening devices in our embassy in Moscow. How will the presence of these listening devices affect Soviet-American detente?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that is a matter that ought to be discussed at this stage. I have heard rumors concerning it, but I don't think it is a matter that ought to be discussed at this point.

QUESTION: Will Mr. Kissinger be briefing you on this subject?

THE PRESIDENT: The proper authority in the Federal Government will.

QUESTION: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: If it is true, it's a very serious situation.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very, very much. It's nice to be here. Have a good day -- the rest of it.

END

(AT 4:55 P.M. EST)