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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION  
AT THE  
GREATER ROCKFORD AIRPORT

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

3:23 P.M. CST

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to be here in Rockford with the fine Congressman from this area, John Anderson, and, of course, with Senator Chuck Percy.

I have been in Addison several times, came here to speak on John's behalf a few years ago and been up here with Chuck in this part of the State.

It is delightful to be here, and I would be glad to answer any questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Ronald Reagan has now raised the Watergate issue. Do you think it is a valid issue?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the best response as to whether or not I have connection with Watergate is the fact that the Congress of the United States, the House and the Senate, a Democratic Congress, overwhelmingly approved me as the nominee for Vice President.

I think there were three votes against me in the Senate and 90 some for me; In the House of Representatives, 30 some against me and 300 or thereabouts for me, and this overwhelming vote in both the House and the Senate came after very intensive, extensive investigation by the House Committee on the Judiciary and by the Senate Committee on Rules.

So the Congress, a Democratic Congress, was absolutely convinced I had no connection whatsoever with Watergate, so I think that ought to lay that allegation to rest once and for all.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you vetoed the program in health, the unemployed areas, and Congressman Anderson's bill supported it. This area has a 12-percent unemployment rate. You vetoed it. How do you feel about it now?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, I have, of course, talked to John Anderson about this, and I am very familiar with the very high unemployment rate here in Rockford. But as John and I have agreed, the substitute which we have proposed that I have endorsed would give some \$500 million to the Rockford area in contrast to the counter-cyclical portion of the bill that I vetoed where only some \$225 million would be available.

So under the proposal that I support, that John, I think, also endorses, there would be over twice as much cash or Federal money coming into the Rockford area under our bill in contrast to the bill that I vetoed.

QUESTION: The USS MONTEREY, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: We won the war. (Laughter)

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

THE PRESIDENT: We are confident that I will win in Illinois. I always assume it will be a close contest, and I do today, but I think the good organization that we have in the State under former Governor Ogilvie and the strong endorsement of Chuck Percy and the Illinois Congressional delegation plus great, great support throughout the State among party people as well as others convinces me that we are going to win. Illinois is very critical. It is the first primary in the Middle West and, of course, it is a great State in this area of the country.

Now, a win here would be very encouraging to me, and I suspect it might be rather discouraging to my opponent.

QUESTION: Do you think you would choose Ronald Reagan as Vice Presidential running mate?

THE PRESIDENT: I have indicated that we have a number of very outstanding potential Republicans for the Vice Presidency. I think he would have to be included.

QUESTION: Reagan has said he would fire Kissinger if he got to be President. What do you say to that?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, in the first place, I don't think he will be nominated, and I doubt if he will be elected, but I happen to believe when you look at the results of our foreign policy, where we have achieved significant success in the Middle East with two agreements that have laid the foundation for success in settling the vast differences and the controversial differences in that area of the world, I think that is a tribute to the statesmanship of Henry Kissinger. When you look at the other things that have been done and mainly the fact that we are at peace, I think a Secretary of State, who achieves peace, ought to be complimented rather than criticized.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

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(AT 3:31 P.M. CST)