

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 28

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

At 12:02 P.M. EST  
March 13, 1976  
Saturday

At Guilford College  
Greensboro, North Carolina

THE PRESIDENT: At the outset, I am delighted to be here on the Guilford College campus in sunny North Carolina. We had a few tornadoes yesterday and 19 degree temperature this morning, so it is nice to be here.

I am also somewhat cognizant of the State of North Carolina's interest in basketball. I am an avid reader of the sports page. I just hope that I do as well in North Carolina as Guilford has done for the University and will do in the days ahead.

With that, I will be glad to answer questions. I understand the first one is from Howard Covington.

QUESTION: Good morning, Mr. President. This morning in reference to a report concerning Mr. Callaway following the release of that report, Mr. Callaway has told reporters that he would like to say that you have full faith and confidence in him, but that would have to come from you. Would you comment on that, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Callaway this morning asked that he be temporarily relieved of his responsibilities as Campaign Chairman for the President Ford Committee. It was at his request and I acceded to it. I have known Bo Callaway for 15 or more years. I knew him before he came to Congress, I knew him in the Congress, I knew him as Secretary of the Army, he has been very helpful and effective as the Chairman of the President Ford Committee. I have full faith in Bo Callaway. He is stepping aside until all of the allegations have been answered and we will wait and see, but on a personal basis he is a man of integrity.

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(OVER)

QUESTION: How long do you expect him to be absent from the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no way of knowing the precise time.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been speculation in North Carolina political circles that if you are nominated and elected, Governor Holshouser may be offered a Cabinet position. Have you personally considered or discussed such a possibility with him?

THE PRESIDENT: Jim Holshouser is likewise a long and good personal friend of mine. I have known him on the many trips I have taken to North Carolina. When I came down on many occasions to help Congressional or other candidates, he has done a superb job as Governor of North Carolina. I certainly would consider him for some high office in the next Administration. I would certainly consider him as one of the potential Vice Presidential candidates. We have a number of outstanding members of the Republican Party in the Congress and as Governors and certainly Jim Holshouser would be included among them. And with the new Administration he would certainly be eligible for an outstanding position in the new Administration.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, as early as February 6, Ronald Reagan had asked you to take a position here on the New River here in North Carolina, and we didn't hear any statements until basically yesterday when it came out.

Now, he has been charging that you have used your office for political appointments, and also for other political announcements.

Doesn't this kind of look like the same sort of thing, so is his charges more warranted with the New River Announcement yesterday?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I am very delighted that the Secretary of Interior yesterday made the announcement that he had approved the environmental impact statement, which he has now forwarded to the Council on Environmental Quality, which recommends that the New River be included in the Wild and Scenic River Program some 26.5 miles. It is not before the Council on Environmental Quality.

Secretary Kleppe made the decision totally on his own. He never talked to me about it. I never talked to him about it. The 90-day period, which expired, I think, February 28, gave him the opportunity to examine all of the aspects of it, and he has made the decision 13 days after the deadline which I think is a reasonable and a responsible period of time.

I have read some of these political allegations about my campaign. Let me answer that very categorically.

I have been in 14 political campaigns, including this one. I have also talked affirmatively about my own record, my own campaign, my own promises.

I never paid much attention to last minute political observations or charges. I will run on my own record and not be concerned about these last minute allegations.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to return to the question of Mr. Callaway, if we may. You said that you do not know how long he will be away from the campaign. It is not quite clear to some people as to who will determine whether or not there has been a violation certainly of ethical practices on the part of Mr. Callaway.

Who will make that determination to clear this matter up?

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THE PRESIDENT: They will be made by the proper authorities. The proper authorities could include the Department of Defense where Mr. Callaway was when the charges have been made. It could include any one of the other agencies that might have jurisdiction, but that is a decision to be made by those departments in the investigations that they will undertake.

QUESTION: If those investigations are not beneficial to your campaign or to Mr. Callaway, what do you think that will do to your campaign especially with Mr. Reagan saying that you were connected with Watergate and scandal?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, I think the best answer to any alleged connection that I have with Watergate is the fact that after my nomination for the Vice Presidency the House Committee on the Judiciary and the Senate Committee on Rules held extensive hearings and the volumes of testimony that were taken absolutely cleared me of any charges connected with Watergate whatsoever, and then when the nomination went to the Floor of the House and to the Senate, in the Senate I think I got 90 some votes and three were against me. And bear in mind that is a Democratic or was a Democratic dominated Senate.

When the vote went to the House of Representatives, again totally dominated about two to one by Democrats, 37 House Members voted against me and 375 or 80 voted for me. So I think I have a pretty good endorsement of Democrats and Republicans in the Congress that cleared me of any allegations whatsoever of any connection with Watergate.

So there is no validity to those allegations whatsoever.

Now, the charges against Mr. Callaway will be properly investigated by the proper authorities, and when the decision will be made as to those allegations, I can't give you the precise time schedule.

QUESTION: If Secretary of State Kissinger is indicted in the current investigation concerning the possibility of illegal wiretapping concerning Morton Halperin, will you ask him to resign?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a matter of private litigation and since it is now before the courts, I think it would be totally inappropriate for me to make any comment whatsoever, either as to the issues or as to what I might do following the decision of the court authorities.

QUESTION: You haven't thought about that at all?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not because I don't think it is appropriate for me to get involved when there is a judicial process underway.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, we had Rogers Morton here last week in Highpoint, we are having Mr. Bush tomorrow in Greensboro. We are told by your campaign committee here we will have a number of other Cabinet people here in the next week as well as yourself.

With all respect, I would like to ask you who is minding the store?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this is a Saturday and (Laughter) a lot of people take Saturday off, you know. (Laughter) And I am expanding my work schedule so I can come down and get better acquainted with all the fine people of North Carolina.

QUESTION: Let's address ourselves to next week then, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I am going to be back in Washington tonight. I will be working probably tomorrow a good share of the time and I will be working in Washington because I firmly believe that my principal responsibility is to carry out the responsibilities of being President.

I have tried to maintain that posture. I think I have. The campaigning that I have done has been minimal, it has been mainly focused on weekends which is the right thing to do for a President. If I am able to come to North Carolina one day next week, I can assure you it will, under no circumstances, interfere with my Presidential responsibilities. That is my prime duty and I will maintain that.

QUESTION: Well, who is paying for these political trips for these gentlemen?

THE PRESIDENT: The President Ford Committee is paying totally for my political operations. Who are the other people that you indicated were coming here?

QUESTION: I understand next week that you would have three Cabinet members that would be coming to North Carolina to campaign for you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if they are coming on a political mission the President Ford Committee will pay for it. If they are coming in their responsibilities as Cabinet officers, they will, of course, come under the usual circumstances.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like for you, sir, to elaborate on just what are the accusations against Mr. Callaway, what do you know about them and did you willingly accept his request to step aside or would you have preferred he stayed on?

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THE PRESIDENT: I acceded to his request which I thought was the proper thing to do. I am not totally familiar with the allegations and since they are now or will be shortly under investigation, I think it would be inappropriate for me to discuss them because I could hear one side without getting the benefit of the others and so until the proper authorities in the Executive Branch of the Government have heard the allegations and the refutations by Mr. Callaway, I think it is totally inappropriate for me to even discuss the matter as to substance.

QUESTION: Does that include, sir, not commenting on just what Mr. Callaway said to you about the situation?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Mr. Callaway has said to me that he is fully confident that the net result will be that he will be cleared, and until the charges have been fully investigated, I don't think I should pass judgment on it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, despite recent figures that reflect decreases in inflation and unemployment, millions of Americans are still without jobs and are forced to pay very high prices for goods.

In your opinion, what is viewed as an acceptable limit or level of unemployment and inflation?

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THE PRESIDENT: I won't be satisfied until every person who wants a job can get a job. That is the acceptable limit as far as I am concerned. I am encouraged by the fact that since March of last year when unemployment was 8.9, that it has been reduced to the level of 7.6.

I am encouraged by the fact that since March of last year we have gained 2 million, 200 thousand jobs that were up to the level of 86 million, 300 thousand jobs, which is the same as an all-time high of gain full employment in the United States.

I do say, however, that we have to continue the pressure as we have had to reduce the unemployment.

It is unacceptably high now, but the trend is right, and I can assure you that the policies we are following will continue to reduce unemployment, and I am confident of that result.

QUESTION: You have stated that the primary concern of yours is forcing private enterprise to bear the brunt rather than Federal funding for jobs. Do you feel that private enterprise will continue to higher unemployed persons rather than look first at the bottom line and maintain their profit level?

THE PRESIDENT: First, five out of six jobs in our economic society are in the private sector, so that is where the greatest potential is. I believe that the private sector is expanding, and all the indicators prove that.

Cars are selling more rapidly, retail sales are up, consumer confidence is increasing very rapidly. So the opportunity for the private sector to employ more is obviously there, and I am confident they will, and I think they will do it on the basis that it is good for them, it is good for the country, and I am optimistic that the private sector will have greater opportunities in the months ahead to add to their employment rolls and every indication we see confirms that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on the subject of jobs, college students, particularly, are a little worried about it now because they have been talking about how they are over qualified, the job market is tight, many of them don't get to use their training in skilled jobs because there is a shortage.

Now, can you offer tomorrow's graduates any encouragement?

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THE PRESIDENT: I think the job opportunities for graduates in 1976 from colleges will be far greater than the job opportunities that existed in June of 1975 because the economy is improving and it will get increasingly that way.

We have about 2 million new job seekers every year because we have a burgeoning society in population. So our job is not to be satisfied with 86 million, 300 thousand now gainfully employed, but to absorb in the private sector primarily the new college graduates, the new high school graduates.

I believe that as we move ahead -- and this is March -- the job opportunities for college and high school graduates will be infinitely better. The circumstances certainly point that way very optimistically.

QUESTION: Is the Government going to be involved in any of this hiring?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have, of course, many job opportunities in the Federal Government. In the civilian side, the Federal Government employs roughly 2 million, 100 thousand people. There are always retirements. There are some agencies that will be expanding, there are some that will be contracting. But there will be job opportunities in the Federal Government, and I am certain at the State and local level there likewise will be job opportunities.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, evidently, there has been some sort of an agreement between this country and the People's Republic of China under which we are going to withdraw about half our troops from Taiwan this year. My first question is, we have been told after your trip to China and Mr. Kissinger's trip that there have been no secret deals made, and secondly, after the election, are we going to hear that the other half have been withdrawn?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first there are no secret deals made. In 1972, when the Shanghai Communique was signed, which called for the normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, it was agreed that there would be a reduction from the U. S. troop commitment on Taiwan.

At that time, there were roughly 10,000 U. S. military personnel stationed on Taiwan. It has been gradually reduced from 1972 to the present level of approximately 3,000. This has come about for a number of reasons. One, the situation in Southeast Asia has changed significantly. The war in Vietnam is over and some of those forces there were related to our operations in Vietnam. Other circumstances have changed in the Pacific area.

We have continued, not secretly, but openly, to reduce from approximately 10,000 down to the present level of 3,000, and those present levels will probably be decreased. I cannot give you the precise number, but whatever we have done in that regard has been told to the Congress. It is on the record. Under no circumstances, is it a secret deal. It is a part of what was promised in 1972 and the changed military circumstances in the Pacific area.



QUESTION: Mr. President, is there a long range plan to withdraw our complete troop commitment from Taiwan? Has somebody scaled down our recognition of the Nationalist Government on Taiwan?

THE PRESIDENT: We will continue to have some forces on Taiwan. The exact number has not been determined but there is no final decision as to the precise number or the precise timing.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in Illinois you said under no circumstances will we play second fiddle to anybody militarily. Does this mean that you consider that we are not now second when the Soviet Union has 50 percent more Polaris submarines and 60 percent more ICBMs than the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: I categorically say that the United States is second to none militarily now, and if the Congress carries out my military budget for fiscal year 1977, we will continue to be second to none militarily.

I think what you have to do is take a look at what we have, which is what our military leaders have told me, and previous Presidents, we need for our national security.

We have far more warheads. We have far better accuracy of our ballistic missiles. We have many, many, many more aircraft of a strategic capability -- B-52s, for example. We are in the process of acquiring the B-1s. If you look at the Navy, yes, the Soviet Union has more ships, but we have, far, far more tonnage in capital ships because our naval leaders said that is what we needed for the United States to protect this country, to deter aggression and to maintain the peace.

And I think our program is second to none and it will stay second to none if the Congress approves the budget that I recommended for the next fiscal year, which, incidentally, is the highest peace time budget in the history of the United States.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, my question is this. Do you see the United States relinquishing control of the Panama Canal in the next four years, and, if so, under what circumstances?

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THE PRESIDENT: Three Presidents have been negotiating since 1965 with the Government of Panama to resolve the dispute that arose following the very sad and tragic incident that happened at that time where some 30 people were killed, including, as I recall, approximately 10 Americans.

These negotiations have gone on for about 10-plus years.

I can assure you of this. The United States, as long as I am President, will do nothing to give up the control of the operations of the Canal, and will do nothing to give up the military protection of the Canal, and that is what the experts in our Government are most concerned about. And whatever is agreed to, if anything, will be submitted openly to the United States Congress for consideration.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Governor Holshouser has said that Ronald Reagan's campaign is all but dead, and he has invited other Republicans to get behind your candidacy.

My question is this, sir. Would you not prefer that Ronald Reagan remain in the campaign right down to the wire for the amount of publicity it brings to you and your candidacy? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I really should not pass judgment on my opponent's campaign, what he will do or what he has done. I can only assure you that the plans we have -- and they have been this from the very beginning when some pessimists were saying, "When are you going to get out?" -- our plans from the beginning have been to stay in and to win in Kansas City, and we are going to do that, and I think we will win in November as well.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Kissinger this week made some statements critical of some of the other Presidential candidates for the statements they have made concerning your Administration's foreign policy. Senator Jackson says this is the first time that he recalls any Secretary of State becoming involved in a political campaign.

First, can you say if the White House had prior knowledge of the statements Mr. Kissinger made in his speech, and secondly, do you agree that they are political in nature?

THE PRESIDENT: Over the years, from my own personal knowledge in Presidential campaigns, most candidates, Democratic or Republican, have adopted the attitude that it was in the best interests of the United States not to make foreign policy a political football.

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I have always adopted that attitude, I think it is the right one. But for the last year, and right up to the present, there have been some political attacks made against foreign policy.

I think that is the wrong approach because we had great success following World War II when there was a true bipartisan foreign policy. I can recall vividly when Senator Arthur Vandenberg worked with President Truman, a Republican and a Democrat, to have a truly bipartisan foreign policy. That was good for the United States. But for about a year now we have had political sharpshooting from individuals who seek the Presidency as to foreign policy.

I can simply say this. I think we had a good foreign policy. We are at peace. We have been successful in the Middle East. We have reassured our allies in Western Europe. We have continued to have a proper dialogue with the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the People's Republic of China, on the other,

We are solidifying our foreign relations with countries all over the world. It is an affirmative, constructive policy in the area of foreign affairs, and we are at peace.

And I can assure you that we are going to continue that kind of a foreign policy. When people attack us, when they attack a policy that is successful, I think we have the obligation to speak up frankly, candidly, forthrightly to say that this is a good policy, and I intend to do it, and I see no reason why Secretary Kissinger should not have the option when he is personally attacked, and the policies that he carries out are attacked, because they have been under attack from politicians for the last 12 months.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you say that you support Mr. Kissinger. Can you say unequivocally that he will be the Secretary of State if you are elected?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I have answered that question a number of ways all with the same purpose and intent. Secretary Kissinger has done a fine job. I have asked him to stay. He can stay as long as he wants to, as long as I am President, because his policies in my Administration under my direction have been successful.

QUESTION: Earlier in response to a question about charges from Governor Reagan that you were misusing the powers of your office to your political advantage, you said you paid no attention to last minute political charges. Do you consider the Governor that desperate a candidate?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, I really should not pass judgment on whether he is desperate or not desperate. I have never found that last minute political allegations are ever very helpful, the public understands them. And as a candidate who has always run an affirmative campaign, never getting into those kinds of charges, I am just not familiar as to when you do it or don't do it because I have never participated in that. That is a judgment he will have to make and the public in North Carolina will have to make.

QUESTION: Sir, one of the judgments he has made in Illinois is that there is word being spread by your people that if he is unsuccessful in the initial primaries, he will no longer be a valid candidate for the Presidency in your party. I wonder how you assess the record so far, primary success yourself, and if you do succeed, as you hope you do, of course, in Illinois, North Carolina and New York, where does that leave you with reference to Mr. Reagan?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me put it in the context of where I think I will be. We started in New Hampshire behind; we won. We started behind in Florida, we won. We were successful in both Vermont and in Massachusetts. I think these successes have, beyond any doubt whatsoever, disposed of the myth that I could not win out of the State of Michigan. I have never lost an election outside of the State of Michigan in 1976 or any other time so that myth is gone.

I happen to believe that we will be successful in Illinois on Tuesday. I think we will be successful here in North Carolina. I always assume they will be close but the momentum is going and the people in the other four States have given us that momentum and they have given it to us because we have good programs. We have run a good campaign. What the impact will be on my opponent, that is for him to decide, not for us to determine.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the event that your Administration wins the Presidential election, what kind of social proposals will you consider for improving programs for higher education?

THE PRESIDENT: For higher education?

QUESTION: Yes, sir, beyond the secondary level.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the programs that we have carried out since I became President and the programs that I think we will carry out in the next four years are aimed at giving financial assistance both in grants and loans and work incentive programs to students.

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I believe the student ought to get the aid and assistance. The student is the proper beneficiary. Those programs, I believe, have been successful and they certainly will be carried out.

What programs beyond those for the next four years, we will have to wait and see, but we are pushing hard those programs that aid the student, and they have been successful and I think they will be.

QUESTION: One more question, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

QUESTION: You are not speaking on the point on the form of block aids or grants, are you, insofar as you consolidate all of your monetary plans in one form such as you proposed?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I have proposed a block grant program for elementary and secondary schools, which is, I think, a forward looking step because at the present time we have roughly 27 elementary and secondary categorical grant programs. They really keep the decision-making as to lower education in Washington, not at the local or State level.

So I have recommended to the Congress that we consolidate those 20-plus elementary and secondary school programs into one block grant program, and then let the same or more amount of money -- in fact, we have recommended more money -- the decision-making be determined at the State and the local level. I believe that the problems of North Carolina elementary and secondary education are quite different than those may be in Alaska or the ones in Maine may be different than those in Florida, so they end up with the same or more money but the decision as to how that money from the Federal Government should be spent would be made locally.

I think that makes a lot of sense. I know it cuts down the red tape, I know it would cut down on Federal bureaucracy and I think it would be good for education. But we have at this point no specific plans for a block grant program as far as higher education is concerned.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much.

We can all go watch for a couple of minutes the basketball game.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EST)