

April 10, 1976

Press Pool Report No. 13--Meeting with PFC Volunteers (El Paso)

President entered to the applause of some 400 people and the music of a mariachi band. He was introduced by John Tower who called for a "genuine El Paso welcome," consisting of shouts of "Viva" and responses of "ole".

Tower told Ford this group of volunteers was "the most spirited he has in the United States" and he promised the President that "these folks are going to deliver this congressional district--four Ford delegates to the national convention."

Ford responded by calling the volunteers tops in quality, quantity and energy. Then he said: "We start out, I think, in Texas as an underdog." But he said that with a combination of his policies, "Tower's leadership and the local organization, "We're going to win." The assumption is that he was talking about the entire Texas primary.

In reviewing the accomplishments of his administration, Mr. Ford said: "We were capitulated (sic) into the worst economic recession this country has had in 40 years" but have come out of the recession and "regained 375,000 new jobs in America." This is a reference to jobs gained in March.

He said he had vetoed 47 bills, "an all time record," and would veto any more of "those bloated appropriation bills" that Congress sends to him "again and again and again".

Then he launched into the standard explanation of his defense policies. He called upon the volunteers to use administration policies as "talking points" and said: "I hope you go out and get better than 51 percent. I'm going to be watching you. I'm going to count on you. We won't let you down." This was greeted by a chorus of "vivas."

El Paso Mayor Don Henderson, after first explaining that it was "exciting" to rub shoulders with the President and ride in a presidential limousine, then presented Ford with a cream-colored 10-gallon hat. Ford tried it on to cheers, took it off and said, "There's a little note in here. It says, 'Like hell it's yours, put it back.'" Then he turned to the crowd and said, "I don't think you're Indian givers".

Henderson then gave Ford a pair of black leather cowboy boots with brown trim which he said cost \$500.

Ford said, "My big problem is I have a son. He's really a bronco-bustin' horse-lovin' person..." Ford said he frequently borrows items from his closet and doesn't return those he likes, but he won't have a chance to do it with the boots. "I'm going to lock these up," the President explained.

He then waded into the audience, tried on a hat worn by one of the mariachi band players that was identified to your poolers as a sombrero charro and left for his suite to music and cheers.

Dean Fischer--Time
Lou Cannon--Washington Post