

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 30

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

9:13 A.M. CST
April 10, 1976
Saturday

In the International Ballroom
At the Fairmont Hotel
Dallas, Texas

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Won't you all sit down, please.

We had a great day in Texas yesterday. One regret, I wish I could have stayed and watched the Rangers win that ball game last night. It must have been a real fine game, 11 innings, excellent. You all loved it in Texas, didn't you?

Yes?

QUESTION: Welcome to Texas, Mr. President. The Dallas Fort-Worth Sigma Delta Chi is pleased to have a chance to ask you a few questions.

The first question is, last night you spoke about stopping the flow of illegal drugs across the Mexican border. What is your Administration doing to stop the flow of illegal immigrants across the Mexican border?

THE PRESIDENT: First, in the budget I submitted for fiscal year 1977, we have increased the funds or will make available more personnel to work with local authorities. I have discussed the problem with the President of Mexico, President Echeverria.

The top legal authorities in this country have continued their work with the authorities on a comparable level in Mexico. It is a very serious matter, and we are doing our utmost in every way possible to prevent the flow of illegal aliens into the United States.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION: Mr. President, a few weeks ago Deputy Secretary of Defense Bill Clements was in Dallas, and at a press conference he was asked a question about the Panama Canal negotiations. He said that there is a possibility that those negotiations might result in a partnership between the United States and Panama in the operation and defense of that canal. Is there such a possibility?

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THE PRESIDENT: I think it is premature to come to any conclusion as to what might be the final resolution of the longstanding differences between the United States and Panama. Three Presidents have had representatives negotiating on this very controversial issue.

I can simply say -- and say it very emphatically -- that the United States will never give up its defense rights to the Panama Canal and will never give up its operational rights as far as Panama is concerned. Since there is no resolution today, I don't think I should prejudge any detailed final settlement in this conflict or controversy.

I can assure everybody in the United States that we will protect defense and operational responsibilities as far as the Panama Canal is concerned.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if requested, will you commute the sentences of or pardon any other Watergate conspirators?

THE PRESIDENT: I would expect that all requests for pardon or any other action would come through the normal channels, through the Pardon Attorney in the Department of Justice. It would be inappropriate for me to make any comment because none of those requests have come to me through the proper authorities. Until and unless they do, it is inadvisable for me to make any conclusion one way or another.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of the heightened tension in the Middle East, especially with the Soviet-backed penetration of Syria into Lebanon and increased activity of the PLO, do you think your policy of curtailing defense funds from Israel is expedient or do you plan to re-examine that policy with regard to restoration of the \$550 million in interim funds? Also, what is our Government going to do to prevent the Syrian-Soviet takeover of Lebanon?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me set the record straight. In the fiscal year 1976 budget for foreign aid, I recommended \$1.5 billion for military assistance for Israel, half of which would be forgiven, which means half of it is a grant -- not a sale or loan -- and in addition I recommended \$700 million in economic aid and assistance to Israel for a total of \$2.2 billion for Israel in a 12-month period.

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Number two, for fiscal year 1977 I recommended \$1 billion in military aid and assistance for Israel, again half of which would be forgiven. I recommended, as I recall, \$600 million in economic aid and assistance for Israel for a 12-month period, which means over a 27-month period I recommended to the Congress \$2.5 billion in military assistance, half of which would be forgiven, and something over \$1 billion in economic aid for Israel.

All of my technical advisers in the Executive Branch of the Government tell me that those funds are ample for military as well as economic assistance for Israel.

Now, the Congress, on a tentative basis, has added another \$500 million for military assistance. My technical advisers tell me that this is unneeded, unnecessary for the security and survival of Israel.

I think what I have proposed is fully adequate to meet any challenge that Israel might have for its security and survival.

On the second question, our policy in Lebanon, which relates to the whole Middle East, is number one, to achieve a cease-fire and a permanent cease-fire; number two, to accomplish a political settlement of a very complicated and controversial problem in Lebanon; number three, we are urging every party, those within the Middle East and others, to have restraint until we can achieve a political settlement.

I don't believe that there has been any rash action by any party so far, and we certainly will use our maximum diplomatic influence to make certain that doesn't happen.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, don't you consider what is happening there in the past week, with all the killing going on, and we know this is backed by Soviet arms, don't you consider this a heightened thing, and don't you consider that rash military action, and if, Syria does take over and Israel is faced with another border with a hostile force, don't you think in view of all this that perhaps you should reconsider your judgment, your previous judgments?

THE PRESIDENT: You are presenting the worst possible case. We do not expect that to take place or transpire, and we are maximizing our efforts to prevent it to preclude it. And I don't think it will happen.

Therefore, the military recommendations of \$2.5 billion for Israel is fully adequate to meet the circumstances we think will take place.

QUESTION: Mr. President, just a few weeks ago in this very hotel Secretary Kissinger said that we will no longer tolerate any further Cuban intervention abroad.

And I am wondering just how far you are committed to back up that threat, especially in the view that there are now some 20 Russian combat pilots in Cuba?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say that the statement made by Secretary Kissinger, in effect, is my statement. I believe that, and he was carrying out what I have personally said myself.

Number two, over a longer period of time, there have been Soviet pilots in Cuba. We don't believe that there is any significant change in that situation today from the past, and we certainly will be alert to recognize any change if one does occur, and we would object if there was any significant change.

QUESTION: Mr. Ford, several Members of the Congressional Black Caucus and other black political leaders have said that they will not endorse a Presidential candidate right now because they are not addressing themselves to the specific needs of Black Americans; i.e. unemployment, welfare and things like that.

What will you do to get the Black American vote, and just how important is that vote to you?

THE PRESIDENT: I want the votes to the maximum degree possible of all elements of our society.

I don't believe that one should make a specific appeal to any segment of our society for a vote on the basis of what I promise.

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It is my aim and objective, it has been, it is and it will be, to have a program that meets the needs of all segments of our society.

I recognize that there are certain interests that one group or another may have. In the case of blacks, the minority economic assistance program.

We have done well in that. We have done very well in trying to provide summer youth employment. I recommended the maximum possible under the law, and that has a particular impact on minority youth because they have the highest rate of unemployment.

So what we try to do is to recognize a problem that affects all of our citizens. If it affects one group more than another, and we get an answer, it, in my opinion, is the right approach.

But to offer as a specific program to a particular group in order to get their votes, I don't think that is the way a candidate for the Presidency should operate. I don't intend to do that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this is a question about John Connally, milk mustache or not, Mr. Connally would definitely be an asset to you, especially in Texas now and later as a running mate.

If he does not support you in the campaign, will this automatically erase him as a running mate possibility?

THE PRESIDENT: John Connally has made a decision which was his decision, as I understand it, not to support any of the two Republican candidates in the primary.

I respect his judgments. John Connally is a very close personal friend of mine. I have great respect for his record in public office and his record as a citizen of the State of Texas. I wouldn't think that his failure to support me would in anyway whatsoever prejudice any opportunity to serve in my Administration for the next four years.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of your remarks last night concerning drug traffic across the borders of Texas and Mexico and the increased Government pressure and crackdown on pushers especially, will there be any utilization of the so-called "Shaffer Commission Report", the President's Commission on Marijuana and Dangerous Drugs and a re-evaluation of what you consider dangerous drugs and dangerous drug traffic, i.e., with regard to the decriminalization or legalization of marijuana?

THE PRESIDENT: I do not believe in the decriminalization of marijuana. I have said that many, many times. There is no conclusive evidence that I have seen. Much research has been under taken. I see no preponderance of the evidence which indicates to me that marijuana doesn't have an adverse potential impact on American's health. Until there is that kind of evidence, I strongly believe, I am against the decriminalization of marijuana.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, before coming to Texas you indicated that you felt you were coming as the underdog. How do you feel you will leave?

THE PRESIDENT: I am greatly encouraged, but I still think we are the underdog. I am getting more optimistic because we have had a great response since we have been in Texas yesterday, and the response today so far has been equally good.

We have a fine leader of our organization in Senator John Tower. We have a wonderful group of volunteer workers. I think we have the right policies, not only for Texas, but for the country, so as we move closer and closer to that very crucial primary, I think we will do increasingly better, and we might surprise some people.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said that you have the right policies for Texas. Your signing of an energy bill has not been popular in Texas. How are you justifying this to the Texas oil industry?

THE PRESIDENT: I think a little history might be helpful. In January of 1975 in the State of the Union Message I came out wholeheartedly for the deregulation of oil, as well as the deregulation of natural gas.

As a matter of fact, I said that Congress should authorize the deregulation of oil by April 1, 1975. Unfortunately, the Congress did not follow my recommendations of better than a year ago. After laboring long, from January through most of December, the Congress sent me a bill that included four of the 13 energy proposals that I recommended in a mix of good and bad in the remainder of the legislation.

As I analyzed the pros and cons, it seemed to me that the best choice for me under those circumstances was to sign the bill and to try to get the Congress to do what I had recommended in January, which was not only the deregulation of oil, but the deregulation of natural gas.

I think we are making headway. We have had some disappointments, but my firm personal conviction today is what I recommended to the Congress in January of 1975.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the House committee report released last week indicated that the Administration underestimated the proposed budget by nearly \$8 billion. Would you comment on this, and also tell us in light of election year pressures, how hard you will fight and how far you will go to hold down Federal spending?

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THE PRESIDENT: That is a matter of judgment. The several budget committees made their own calculations as to what expenditures ought to be. I strongly disagree with the increased expenditures that those budget committees are proposing. The \$394.4 billion spending recommendation that I proposed I believe today is the right one, and I regret that the Congress has recommended or the two committees in the Congress have recommended additional spending.

I don't think it is necessary. As I have said many times in the last 19 months, I have vetoed 47 bills and 39 of those have been sustained, and we have saved the taxpayers \$13 billion. If the Congress sends down in the coming months additional bills for overspending, I will continue to veto them again, again and again.

I think the Congress is wrong. We don't need that extra spending.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of your answer a few minutes ago about the black vote and whether you would try and achieve this or not, in view of the fact that many political candidates who have either ignored the possibility of blacks actually putting them in office or not, is it correct to assume that you either don't care about the black vote or you feel that the black vote will have no weight during this Presidential election?

THE PRESIDENT: I would like as many supporters in the black community as possible. I have always had it in my own Congressional race. I have always believed that the black community should play a meaningful part in an election. I intend to do what I can in presenting the broad programs I have recommended and I believe they will help and assist all minorities.

But, to go out and offer a particular piece of legislation for any segment of our society in order to get them to vote for me I think is the wrong approach for a Presidential candidate. I want help, and assistance, from the black community, but I don't intend to sacrifice my overall approach, which I think is in the best interest of the United States.

QUESTION: Mr. President, yesterday you took your hard line stance again on heroin traffic here in this country, and there has been some talk among Texas representatives that some budget allocations for immigration agents along the Texas-Mexican border could be cut back a little bit, necessitating a drop in the number of agents guarding the border.

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I think you are aware there has been a larger amount of heroin traffic coming across from Mexico. Would you be in favor of increasing the budget for immigration agents to watch the border?

THE PRESIDENT: As I said last night, 80 or 90 percent of the heroin that comes into the United States comes across our Southern borders. We have proposed that there be a beefing up of our total Federal law enforcement efforts in this area in order to meet this challenge.

Now, if we find at any point that more people are needed or more money is required to meet this problem, I will be very, very anxious to suggest additional appropriations, but it has to be shown as a matter of need.

I think based on the facts that were presented to me in November and December of last year, when we put the budget together, that what we recommended was adequate, fully adequate. But, if the circumstances prove otherwise, of course I would recommend the additional funds, if needed.

QUESTION: Mr. President, have you and Governor Connally had any conversations or talks about the possibility of his being your runningmate or taking a high Cabinet post?

THE PRESIDENT: We, in our very delightful dinner at the White House about a week ago, covered a wide range of matters, including politics, but I don't think I should divulge a personal conversation between my good friend and myself. It was a very broad discussion.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, while Rogers Morton was in Fort Worth this past week, he predicted that you would probably talk to a wide range of top Republicans before choosing your running mate, is that correct?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is the obligation of a Presidential candidate to encourage recommendations from all segments of our party and in Kansas City and perhaps before I will certainly solicit such recommendations from people in the party from all over the country.

QUESTION: Mr. President, when Ronald Reagan was in Dallas earlier this week, he reiterated his concerns about Eastern Europe.

Last Friday, you reiterated this country's support or responsiveness, I believe you said as responsibly as is possible to the aspirations for autonomy of Eastern Europe.

How far would your Administration go in the event of an uprising such as in Hungary in the '50s and Czechoslovakia in the '60s?

THE PRESIDENT: The Helsinki agreements provided that we would support all peaceful means of individuals or nations achieving their freedom. I don't believe the United States should say we are going to war if certain things happen in Eastern Europe.

I think we ought to work with individuals and with countries to make sure that their freedom and their independence is achieved and maintained, but to say the United States would take military action under certain circumstances is not the proper attitude for a President of the United States to take at a time when we are at peace.

We ought to encourage individuals and national freedom and independence, but I don't think we should rattle our sabre. I think we ought to work within the overall context rather than to say we will do something in a military sense.

QUESTION: Mr. Reagan is rattling his sabre?

THE PRESIDENT: I wouldn't want to judge that. I can only speak authoritatively about my own policies, which I have tried to in response to your question.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your speech last night, you alluded to the progress that has been made in treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers and said that you plan to step up those programs. In this city today, drug treatment programs are operating in excess of their capacity, and in some cases even putting addicts on waiting lists.

Can you give us a more specific idea what improvements in those programs you will propose and when?

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THE PRESIDENT: In the budget for Fiscal Year 1977, we increased the amount of money for the treatment programs where the Federal Government has a responsibility.

On the basis of the recommendations that came to me from the authorities in the Executive Branch, the money was increased, there will be an added number of treatment opportunities.

If there is a need for specific help here in Dallas, either under the LEAA program or any other Federal program, we will do our utmost to be helpful.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a couple of campaign questions. One, in view of what has been made public thus far in the Callaway affair, do you believe he acted too hastily in leaving your campaign?

Secondly, in the Texas primary, I believe your Texas campaign Chairman, Senator Tower, has been quoted as saying unless Mr. Reagan gains at least 75 percent of the Texas primary vote or delegates that he should drop out of the race. Do you agree with that?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the action taken by Bo Callaway was his initiative. He said that although he expected to be totally cleared, he felt that the possibility of Senate hearings, the added news media discussion of his circumstances would injure my campaign.

On the basis of his request, I accepted his resignation. I think he did, under the circumstances, what was right and I applaud and I thank him for his unselfishness in these circumstances.

Number two, as I said, we are doing our utmost to do well here in Texas, and I think we are going to do increasingly better. I think it is premature for me to make any recommendation to former Governor Reagan, that is a decision for him to make. So I am not going to, under any circumstances, advise him. That is his choice, not mine.

QUESTION: Can you estimate a percentage in the primary?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't play the numbers game.

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QUESTION: You talked about cooperation from the Mexican Government in stopping the hard drug flow. What are you doing to get similar cooperation from that Government in stopping the abuse of U. S. citizens in the Mexican prisons?

THE PRESIDENT: We, of course, expect every foreign government to work with us in the protection of the rights of American citizens. We have, through the proper channels in this case, indicated our deep concern for the protection of the rights of American citizens in Mexico.

On the other hand, we repeatedly tell Americans who go to other countries that they have to live up to the laws of those countries. It's a two-way street. We don't condone violence in this country in violation of our laws, and I don't think we should condone violence in other countries in violation of their laws.

But I can assure you that through proper channels, we have indicated very strongly that the legitimate rights of all Americans in those countries should be fully protected, and we will continue that policy.

QUESTION: Mr. President, since we are running out of questioners, may I ask you two questions? One is, have you seen "All the President's Men", and if so, what do you think of it?

The second question is, what you think of kiss-and-tell Secretary of State? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: I have not seen "All of the President's Men". I have been a little busy, so I just haven't seen it, and as far as I know, I have no plans to see it, but I don't quite understand the second question.

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QUESTION: I think it might have reference to the Secretary of State's enjoying parties and things like that and enjoying the limelight.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary of State, I know from personal contact with him, works about 14 hours a day, if not more, and if he wants to have some relaxation, I think that is a personal choice on his part, and as long as he does the job and does it well, which he is doing, I am not going to make any comment about a couple of hours a day where he relaxes and enjoys himself. That is his choice.

QUESTION: Mr. President, it has been reported that former President Nixon's report to you on his trip to China had very little useful substance, is that correct?

THE PRESIDENT: It was very interesting; it was very useful. I read it not once but several times. I was glad to get it. As I said, it was interesting and useful. We will have to wait and see how some of his comments relate to what has happened or may happen in China. But, other than that, I don't think I should comment.

QUESTION: Both you and Governor Reagan apparently consider yourselves underdogs in Texas. Who is the favorite?

THE PRESIDENT: I thought from everything I have read that Governor Reagan came into Texas with the anticipation and expectation that he would win a substantial majority of the delegates here. That is what I read from his campaign managers or other people involved in his campaign.

I looked at the amount of time that he will be spending here, so I believe he anticipates a substantial campaign. He said he was going to all 24 Congressional districts, that he was going to maximize his efforts. As far as I could tell from the press statements, he thinks he is a favorite, or his people do.

We recognize that we came down here as an underdog, but underdogs often win, and we are sure going to try.

QUESTION: Mr. President, why do you consider yourself an underdog?

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THE PRESIDENT: That is a good question because the policies that I have followed for the country as a whole have benefitted I think Texas, as well as the rest of the country. Economic conditions are good in Texas, and they are getting better, and they will get even better.

I have strongly supported a very up-to-date modern unsurpassed military capability, and Texas has a great many military installations, so that policy on my part ought to be fully supported by people in Texas.

But, from what I understand, in the Republican primary there is a situation where we might be an underdog. I am confident that after getting nominated in Kansas City against whoever the Democrats nominate, we will do very well in Texas in November.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. It is nice to see you, and we expect to have another good day in Texas.

END (AT 9:49 A.M. CST)