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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

11:58 A.M. MST

THE PRESIDENT: It is real nice to be here in El Paso with your fine Mayor, Don Henderson, and I am looking forward to several interesting, very important gatherings here, but on this occasion I would like to answer any questions from the local press.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: The continued influx of illegal aliens at a time of high unemployment remains our basic concern in this part of the country. The issue has been debated for years and is still bottled up in committees, and the so-called Rodino bill would make it a crime to employ illegal aliens.

What is your position on that measure, and what message do you have in general for Congress on that position?

THE PRESIDENT: We fully recognize that there is somewhere between six and eight million illegal aliens in the United States, many of them all over the United States. We think it is a problem that has to be resolved in order to meet that challenge. I have increased the number of people in the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the next fiscal year. We are trying to speed up the deportation of those who are here illegally.

The Rodino bill has not come out of the committee. It is controversial. There are some who think it puts too much of a burden on the employer and some social agencies feel that it is discriminatory in part in the procedures that are used. Others think this is the most effective way to ferret out and find those illegal aliens that ought to be deported.

If I have to tilt, I will tilt toward the bill, but I recognize it is extremely controversial, and we will see what happens when it gets down to the White House. I am not making any firm commitments until we see the final bill, but it could be a way to help solve this problem.

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QUESTION: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Many of us in the Christian television community attach a lot of significance to a candidate's religious commitments.

THE PRESIDENT: My family have been Episcopalians since before my lifetime. My wife and I both are, but I have taken a commitment in a broader sense, and I am proud of it.

QUESTION: We have heard it said that you have lots of White House prayer sessions.

THE PRESIDENT: We have a number of prayer group meetings in the White House. I think it is once a week or once every other week. I go to those occasionally.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, the El Paso-Las Cruces area is one of several in the country that is hoping to be selected as the site for the proposed Federal Solar Energy Institute. I think the worry is here that even if we can qualify for the technical qualifications, we may not have the voter population that some other parts of the country have.

THE PRESIDENT: The final decision will be made by the Energy Research and Development Agency (Administration) under Dr. Robert Seamans. They have put out the criteria by which the applications will be judged. Sometime in the latter part of 1976 a decision will be made. It will be made strictly on the merits. It is my understanding that El Paso, along with several other Texas communities, is interested.

There are some other applicants or prospective applicants around the country, but the final decision will be made strictly on the merits as interpreted under the criteria issued by the Energy Research and Development Agency (Administration). Dr. Robert Seamans is the head of that, and I will have full faith in his final judgment.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Ronald Reagan's continued challenge of yourself for the Presidential nomination and the failure of John Connally to thus far endorse your campaign -- do these two facts eliminate these men from consideration of possible Vice Presidential candidates, and how about a George Bush sticker?

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THE PRESIDENT: As I have said many times, you have a lot of fine people here in Texas. John Tower is one who has committed himself and has an outstanding record in the United States Congress. George Bush, unfortunately, and very regrettably, when he continued to have his name before the Senate, in effect took his own candidacy out.

I think that was very unfortunate and very unfair, but that is what happened. Naturally, I would be very pleased if John Connally would endorse me, but that is a decision he has to make. I think it is premature at this time to establish any criteria for any Vice Presidential candidate. I have to win first, and then we will make some judgments on that.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT: It is nice to see you all.

END (AT 12:03 P.M. MST)