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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
WITH THE
OVERFLOW CROWD AT PEACHTREE HIGH SCHOOL

9:00 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it has just been great to be in Peachtree High School. I can't remember a more responsive audience, an audience that had better questions, and I am deeply grateful that all of you came and were willing to hear it over a PA system. I regret, of course, that all of you couldn't be where you could have heard and seen at the same time, so I think in all equity maybe we ought to let maybe two or four questions come from all of you.

QUESTION: I wonder if you would be willing or able to confirm any of the allegations by Bernstein and Woodward about the condition of your predecessor in the last few weeks of his term in office?

THE PRESIDENT: The question is, can I confirm or deny any of the allegations in the Woodward and Bernstein book concerning my predecessor.

The only things I can confirm or deny are my personal observations and, in my experiences in those last two or three weeks, I would categorically deny any of the charges as far as I could tell. And, therefore, I won't expand my comments beyond that because you ask me what I know and all I know is what I have said -- that I did not see any evidence of the things that they allege in that book.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION: Since the United Nations is controlled mostly by our enemies, don't you think we could withdraw from the United Nations?

THE PRESIDENT: The question is, do I think we should withdraw from the United Nations?

I respectfully disagree with that. In my opinion, you have 140-some nations in there at the present time. It is a body where if we continue to do what is right and stand up and fight for what is right, such as Pat Moynihan did and as Bill Scranton is doing now, I think we will get things done the way we want them done.

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If we leave it and let them do it, you have no influence, no impact whatsoever, and I have never found you can win many ballgames by sitting on the sidelines. I think you have to get in and play in it and that is where we ought to be.

QUESTION: Is there any chance of a national health insurance program that is equitable to everybody being passed?

THE PRESIDENT: The question is, is there any possibility of an equitable, fair national health insurance program being enacted?

I don't believe there is any possibility in 1976. I have for the last 10 years -- 8 of those while I was a Member of Congress -- seen half a dozen to a dozen various national health insurance programs recommended by Senator Kennedy and the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association -- well, you name it. They all had their own plan.

I have seen none that in my judgment we could afford today. I have seen none that I think Congress would enact. I see none that have yet balanced out the equities between the doctor and patient relationship on the one hand, the cost to the Government on the other, and the bureaucracy problems on another. Well, there are a whole lot of other plans.

So to answer your question, there has been no unanimity on any program that I have seen that would result in enactment in the foreseeable future.

Now, I would like to add one feature, and this doesn't mean I am for a particular national health insurance program because I am not, but I have become deeply concerned over the last few years for what we call "catastrophic illness" and how families, even well-to-do families, can carry the burden and the cost of an extended illness, or a very extended illness -- and I have seen some very tragic cases and I suspect many people in this audience have seen families of friends, of neighbors, of relatives where a tragedy of that kind has taken place.

I have recommended to the Congress that we attack that problem in Medicare and Medicaid because that would at least relieve the financial burdens of those people who have had a serious catastrophic illness, and there is no way, except in the most minute cases, where a family can carry the costs that we now have in those instances.

Yes?

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QUESTION: Doesn't that go for all persons over the age of 65?

THE PRESIDENT: In the program that I recommended, that is correct.

QUESTION: What about the other people?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have to do what we can in steps, and this is the area -- and there are about three to four million of them so it is not an inconsequential step, but it is a step that I think we could handle in the first step of trying to do something affirmative.

One more. Somebody in the middle here.

Yes?

QUESTION: An all-volunteer service seems to be coming under some question now. Some Members of Congress have recently raised the additional question of whether we should go back to some sort of draft system. Would you comment on that, please?

THE PRESIDENT: I have long been an advocate, prior to and still am, of the all-volunteer military force. I think it has worked well. We are able today to satisfy the needs of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines at a total active duty strength of 2,100,000 by an all-volunteer military force. I believe that in peacetime -- and we are at peace -- we can have and use -- and use effectively -- an all-volunteer military force. It cuts down your training base -- you get people to stay in longer, you don't have the same turnover, you have to pay them more and you have to have better fringe benefits, so to speak, but in the long run it is the right way.

Now if we went up to four million on active duty for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, as one individual in this country is advocating, I guess, because he says the Soviet Union has four million in their active duty -- therefore, we ought to have four million -- now I don't agree with that. But if you went from 2 million to 4 million, you would undoubtedly have to have selective service or the draft.

I think we can have a first class Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines and have it under an all-volunteer concept. You will have a more alert, you will have a better trained, you will have a career force and it will be a better military organization.

Thank you.

END (AT 9:07 P.M. EST)