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THE WHITE HOUSE
REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
TYLER JUNIOR COLLEGE

9:02 A.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Dr. Jenkins, Senator Tower, Mr. Flock, Jo Nell Henslee, distinguished public officials, students, faculty and guests of Tyler Junior College:

I would especially like to thank the Apache Belles for their very warm and enthusiastic welcome. (Laughter)

Second, it is a great honor to be at this outstanding junior college, one of the biggest and very finest in the country, and congratulations to you --

Let me add a special hello to your very popular student body President, Jo Nell Henslee. With all due respect to Jimmy Carter, she is my kind of peanut. (Laughter)

Finally, one of the primary responsibilities of this or any other institution of learning and all others is to provide students with facts, facts and expertise that will prepare you for the decision-making that every job, every career, every profession calls for.

The President of the United States must also deal in facts, and today I would like to share some of those facts with you so that you can intelligently reach your own conclusions on a matter of supreme importance to our United States.

Somewhere between the snows of New Hampshire and the sunny climes down in Florida, the focus of this year's Republican campaign for the Presidency began to shift away from the growing strength and the growing prosperity of the American economy to a new and more complex issue -- the strength of America's military forces.

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Now, I have been down the campaign trail before, and I know there is a reason why a challenger will try to shift his attack. It is called second place. It makes you try harder and sometimes swing wilder. Having failed on the economic issue, the central thrust of my opponent's new strategy is to claim that the United States has become inferior to the Soviet Union, especially in military strength.

He deliberately quotes statistics without any in-depth understanding of them. His answer to the alleged inferiority apparently is to change our force structure so that it matches the Soviets, ship for ship, weapon for weapon, man for man, rather than looking at the overall capabilities.

First, let me say that the issue is not our military capabilities today. They are adequate to meet any challenge, let there be no doubt about that. By the testimony of all who know -- and I spent much of my life in the Congress and in the Vice Presidency and Presidency dealing with defense matters in-depth.

By the testimony of Secretaries of Defense, past and present, Deputy Secretary Clements, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, our military forces are capable of fulfilling their assigned missions, period.

The important issue is not today, but tomorrow. That is why I have been working with the Congress and in the country to adopt a defense budget for the United States which will provide for our national security in the years ahead.

But, let's look at the problem for a moment, let's look at the question of whether, as my opponent implies, we should try to reshape our armed forces so that they mirror those of the Soviet Union.

What steps would we have to take in order to be exactly like them? The answer shows a great deal about how superficial those charges are. In order to parallel Soviet forces, we would have to begin by mothballing the 13 aircraft carriers that now sail the seas flying the American flag.

Our huge nuclear aircraft carriers, like the Enterprise, the Nimitz and the Forrestal have no Soviet counterparts. Over half the Russian Navy consists of small patrol craft, minesweepers and other small vessels.

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So, to match the Soviet Union, as my opponent seems to suggest, we would have to retire our larger, more sophisticated ships with their awesome firepower and replace them with many, many more patrol craft, minesweepers and the like. No one would truly believe that this would be a sane defense policy to protect America and to protect our freedoms around the world.

Look at our Air Force and ask what it would be like to make it exactly like the Soviet Air Force. We would have to begin by grounding most of our B-52 bombers and calling off the progress we are making in developing a new, more capable B-1 bomber.

Or, think of our Marines, those valiant men who have won so many famous battles for us in the past. To parallel the Soviets we would have to jetison the Marine Corps because the Russians have nothing comparable in either quality or in dedication.

Now, obviously my opponent is not foolish enough to seriously suggest that we should do away with our carriers, our B-52s or the Marine Corps. The significant point to make is that simplistic and superficial charges based on limited information and experience could lead to irresponsible and fundamentally harmful policy decisions.

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Let's take one of his favorite charges -- that the Soviets have twice as many men in uniform as the United States does. Presumably that means he wants to double the number of men and women that we now have in uniform from 2,100,000 to about 4 million. Obviously, that would require us to reimpose the draft to obtain sufficient manpower.

In turn, more than 2 million of our young people now in school or working would have to go into the armed forces, presumably or probably most of them under selective service. We would have to divert billions of dollars now being spent for sophisticated new weapons systems for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines to pay the added manpower costs.

Money that should be spent on the new B-1 bomber or the development of a new ballistic missile or expanding our fleet would be wasted on maintaining personnel levels that would add little to our overall military capabilities.

No reputable military expert that I know about, or have heard about, has suggested such a course of action. Such a policy, if you can call it that, would undermine rather than strengthen our defenses. Let's look at the manpower question another way.

The United States has some 3 million farm workers in all 50 States. The Soviet Union has 39 million farm workers. Does that mean that we have to increase the number of farmers by 36 million in order to be equal to the Soviet Union? Of course not.

Our American farmers equipped with the best technology in the world, relying on the free markets and their own ingenuity feed seven times more than their Soviet counterparts year-in and year-out. Indeed, American farmers even help to feed the Soviet people.

The bottom line is this: It isn't always the number of men that count in the final analysis, but the quality. And, as far as I am concerned, the men and women of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines are the best in the world bar none, and we can be proud of them.

Obviously, we should exercise great caution before heeding the words of a man who obviously has no experience and little understanding of the complexity of national defense matters. Superficial arguments based on incomplete knowledge are fundamentally harmful rather than helpful. I believe that a man who is campaigning for the highest office in this land must be willing to talk seriously about his policies and the consequences of his policies.

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When it comes to the life and death decisions of our national security, the decisions must be the right ones. There are no retakes in the Oval Office. Glibness is not good enough; superficiality is not good enough. Every serious candidate for the Presidency must be equal to the burdens and the responsibility of the Presidency.

Sometimes when I hear the critics complaining about America, its defense policy, America and its foreign policy, always complaining but never offering any programs of their own, I am reminded of one of the finest Texans I ever had the privilege to know in the Congress of the United States.

Sam Rayburn served 50 years in Washington with over 3,000 Congressmen and Senators and 8 different Presidents. At the end of a long day, after he had worked hard to make a better life for America, when he heard from the chronic complainers, Sam Rayburn loved to recall what his father once told him: "Any donkey can kick a barn down but it takes an awfully good carpenter to build one up."

Now as far as the national security policies of the United States are concerned, I am convinced that the American people would rather have a President who is constructively seeking to build the foundations of a lasting security than someone who spends most of his time trying to kick them down. It is irresponsible and a disservice to the American people to lead them to believe that we are inferior when we are not, that our military strength is insufficient when it is not, or that there are pat answers and simple solutions to the complex issues of national security when there are none.

This country must have a President who can do more than scratch the surface of complicated problems. It is not enough to ask questions; it is not enough to offer criticism. It is the obligation of every candidate for the Presidency of the United States to offer alternatives, to deal in specifics, to provide some answers to the questions that he raises.

If a candidate fails in that responsibility, he has failed to satisfy the most fundamental requirement of a political campaign and of political leadership in this country. He has failed to level with the American people. You must demand more than that of Presidential candidates. The elections of 1976 are much too important for you to make your decisions on the basis of less than complete knowledge.

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My record is clear. I have served as your President for more than 21 months and during that period I have recommended the two largest military budgets in our Nation's history. They were needed to see that our military capabilities continue to be strong in the years ahead, as they must be if we are to find the peace and security we all seek.

A budget must also be based on facts and hard reality. One fact is that in recent years the Soviet Union has been spending more and more money for armaments, while successive American military budgets have been cut back by the Congress. It is a trend that cannot, must not and will not continue. My budget for fiscal year 1977 both reverses this trend and makes sure, makes positive that our American fighting forces will continue to be unsurpassed by any nation on the globe.

It is a fact, and in this real world a very comforting fact, today America is a Nation at peace, a Nation with new confidence in itself and in its future, a Nation that stands tall and strong and free as it enters its third century. If this is your idea of what America should be, I respectfully ask for your support this Saturday, next November, and in the challenging years ahead.

Thank you very much.

I am delighted now to answer any of the questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, we have heard many accusations by your Republican opponent, Mr. Reagan, and in one of these he states that the United States is going to give up control of the Panama Canal Zone, and I was wondering if this accusation had any merit to it?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me put the whole problem in proper perspective.

In 1964, riots broke out in Panama and 24 people were killed -- 20 Panamanians and 4 Americans -- and on that occasion it was decided by the then President Lyndon Johnson that the United States should start negotiating with the Panama Government to try and resolve how we could keep the Canal open for our use as well as the use of other parties as they do today, and those negotiations have carried on under President Johnson, Mr. Nixon and my Administration trying to find an answer.

The attempt we are making is to find an answer so that the United States can maintain operational control, maintenance control and defense control during the economic lifetime of the Canal over a long period of time, anywhere from 40 to 50 years; certainly well into the next century. No decisions have been made and this negotiating process has gone on for 12 or 13 years.

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I think it is constructive to negotiate, as my two predecessors did. Now my Republican opponent, by his very, I think, critical statements in effect says call off the negotiations. Let's think about the consequences of calling off those negotiations.

You would undoubtedly have more riots, undoubtedly more bloodshed. You would incur the enmity, antagonism of 309 million people in Latin and South America, 25 nations, and if we were to keep the Canal open with these riots and this guerrilla activity that would inevitably result, the United States would have to add significantly to the present military forces there. We now have roughly 10,000 Army personnel down there to defend the Canal. You would have to double it or triple it.

Now I think those very bad consequences can be overcome by responsible negotiation and anybody who wants to call off the negotiations by the language which has been used or the points that have been made, I think is terribly irresponsible, and I intend to continue the negotiations and I assure you we will not do anything that will undercut, destroy the national security interests of the United States in the Panama Canal.

QUESTION: Mr. President, we are so proud of Tyler Junior College and its role in education, and we are so honored that you chose to come here.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

QUESTION: I would like for you to comment about your thoughts about the place of the junior college in America today.

THE PRESIDENT: I have had a lot of experience, practical experience with junior colleges, because, as I am sure Dr. Jenkins knows, the Grand Rapids Junior College was one of the first that was founded in my home town back in about 1912 or 1913 and it is a fine junior college, so I know the benefits, not only now but over the years. This was particularly true during the Depression when many young people couldn't go to a four-year school -- they had to stay home and live with their parents and go to a junior college.

Now in the Congress of the United States, about 10 years ago the Congress approved -- and I supported -- the effort of the Federal Government to provide aid and assistance, financial aid and assistance to what on a national level has been called community colleges and junior colleges, as I understand it, which are a part of that overall complex.

I believe very strongly that the community college, the junior college, has a very significant and vital impact on our educational process and I fully support them.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, as a member of the Reserves of our Armed Forces, I have noted a continuing shortage of military hardware. If we are to maintain an adequate reserve force we must have the equipment to train with. Can anything be done about these shortages?

THE PRESIDENT: In the budget that I submitted for the next fiscal year, which begins October 1, on the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense we have added extra money to upgrade or modernize our reserve forces, whether they are the Army, the Navy, the Air Force or the Marines, or the National Guard. There is no question about the fact that during the Vietnam War and at the time of the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East that our reserve hardware was cut back or was not kept flowing at the right level because we were diverting much of our mobilization reserve either to Vietnam or we did, on some occasions, to the Middle East.

But we are at peace. We now have an obligation to upgrade and to modernize the equipment that our reserve forces have. And in the budget for next fiscal year we are trying to do that, and I am telling you very straightforwardly I recognize the problem that developed over a period of five years. We are going to correct it because the Reserves play a very vital part in our overall national defense program.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to know how you feel about the death of the East Texas Marine in San Diego at the Marine depot?

THE PRESIDENT: When I first learned about that tragic incident, I asked the Secretary of Defense to give me a full report on this incident that ended very tragically.

I have received a report from the Secretary of Defense. It apparently is a matter now in litigation or potential litigation so I, as Commander-in-Chief, ought not to comment on the pros or cons.

I have a full report, I know the whole history, it is sad, and it is very tragic.

I can say this, that as a result of that incident and some other developments, certain aspects of Marine training are being changed, and I think changed for the good.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I believe that you and former Secretary of Defense Schlesinger have stated that we would engage in limited nuclear warfare in the defense of South Korea. Could you define limited nuclear warfare and the ramifications of such with reference to the Chinese?

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THE PRESIDENT: I really don't think that I ought to discuss what we would do in any potential--if the potential is there of a war, whether it is limited or nuclear. Certainly, we can speculate but I don't think that I should announce at a forum like this what we would do based on some speculative assumption that we would have a reinvasion of North Korea by South Korea or some other adversary attacking us or attacking an ally.

We have contingency plans to meet all challenges, all challenges. And those plans are available for the Commander-in-Chief to make a decision on under any circumstances, and I can assure you that we will meet all challenges.

We have the options as to what we should do. We have the capability to meet those challenges and this Commander-in-Chief will meet any challenges in the future as decisively as he did when we took action at the time of the MAYAGUEZ affair.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Texas always has been recognized as one of the greatest oil producing States in America. I wonder if you would comment on the big push in Congress and Washington nowadays of breaking up the major oil companies and what effect this would have on our economy?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a very good question, and I am delighted to answer it. We have a number of major oil producers, refiners, producers, et cetera. There is a bill in the United States Senate sponsored by my fellow Michigander, Senator Phil Hart, that wants to break up all major oil companies. It is called the divestiture bill.

We have analyzed that bill and others, and we analyzed those proposals on the basis of this criteria: Would they increase the availability of domestic oil? Those are the two criteria. Would they reduce cost to the consumer and would they end up in getting more production so we would be less dependent on foreign oil?

As we analyzed those bills that would break up our major oil companies and analyzed them against those two criteria, we come to the conclusion that divestiture as exemplified by that bill is wrong and, therefore, I am opposed to it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, recently Dr. Kissinger announced a new ten-point program dealing with our relations with Africa. Would you please elaborate on this program and speak specifically what support we will give to the black nationalists in their struggle for majority rule?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me summarize the objectives of our program in Africa. Number one, we strongly believe today, as we have over the 200 year period of our history, in self-determination by people of a country. That is how we got our freedom -- self-determination.

Number two, our policy would guarantee minority rights for any individuals in any of those countries in Africa.

Number three, our policy is one of keeping major powers out of Africa and major powers dominating any one country in Africa.

We don't want to dominate the economy, the political system in any one of those countries, and we don't want any other nation to do it, including the Soviet Union. That is the basis of our program.

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Now, let me be very clear on the last part of the question that you asked.

We are not going to supply any arms to any insurgents. We don't think that is the way for the United States to project itself as a country that wants to help solve some of those controversial problems there. Under no circumstances are we going to provide arms to any of the insurgents. We simply believe in self-determination, guarantee of minority rights and the nondomination of any country by an outside force.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been quite a bit of controversy concerning the national election committee. I was wondering what was your stand and what actions have been taken to give the candidates further money to further their campaigns for the Presidency?

THE PRESIDENT: In 1974, Congress passed the present law. The Supreme Court, on January 30 of this year, said that there were certain provisions of that law that were unconstitutional, including how the Federal Election Commission was established.

A few days after the decision of the Supreme Court, as Senator John Tower knows, we had the Democratic and Republican leadership of the House and Senate down to the White House in the Cabinet Room, and I told them the best thing to do was simply to amend the basic law to provide that the Election Commission could continue its work and that the Congress shouldn't add a lot of extraneous legislation in the process of correcting what the Supreme Court said was wrong.

Now, that was January 30 when the Court made the decision. Two or three days after that I talked to the leaders in the Congress and here it is -- what is the date? (Laughter) April 28. (Laughter) Here it is April 28 and the Congress has not yet finished its work on that legislation. It is unforgiveable.

I had a meeting yesterday with some Members of the House and Senate, and they verified what I have been saying for the last ten days while Congress has been on another vacation. (Laughter) They verified to me that the Congress, even the committee, the Conference Committee, hasn't finished its work and one of the Members there said to me, "Mr. President, will you go out and say that you will agree with this piece of paper that they showed me?"

I said, "Have you finished the job? Can you change it if I say I am going to approve it?" "Oh, yes, we can go back and change it." I am not going to sign any, or indicate to the Congress that I am going to sign anything that they can change when they get in some closed committee room.

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When they finally do their job, 90 days or more after they started it, then I will make a decision, and it may be a veto and I may sign it, but I have to read the fine print, just like everybody else ought to read the fine print.

QUESTION: Mr. President, it has recently been suggested to limit years of service for Members of Congress. As President and as a former Congressman, how do you feel about this proposal?

THE PRESIDENT: I have mixed emotions. I have seen some of the outstanding Members of the Congress whose contribution increased substantially every year that they served, and one of my dearest friends in the Congress is one of your fellow Texans. I served with him on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and on the Committee on Appropriations for 16 years.

George Mahon is one of the most capable, most qualified Members of the Congress that I know, and he has been there 35 or 40 years.

On the other hand, I have seen some that have been there two years and they shouldn't have come in the first place. (Laughter)

So, I do have mixed feelings. When you come right down to it, I think we ought to rely on the good judgment of the people in each Congressional district or the voters in each State for a Senator. If they like the job the Senator or Congressman has done, then they can keep sending him down. If they don't like him, every two years in one case, and every six years in the other, they can make a change.

So, I really think it goes back to whether or not we have faith in the judgment of the people in each district or each State and, boy, I am all for their judgment.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on what basis do you continue to refer to yourself as the underdog in the Texas primary? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: We have seen some polls when we started to actively campaign in Texas that showed that my opponent has been here many, many times and was making an impression with some of his statements. So, when you look at the polls, you have to believe them to some extent.

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Bu , we have narrowed the gap because I think we have a first-class chairman of my committee in Senator John Tower. He is not only a great Senator, but he is a great chairman of my committee.

Then we have a lot of volunteers and they seem to be coming into the various offices in greater numbers, and naturally I think my policy of prosperity at home -- and it is really beginning to move faster and faster and faster -- with everything that is supposed to be going down going down and everything that is supposed to be going up going up.

With our overall policy of defense and foreign policy, I think we have a very good chance of upsetting my opponent. We are sure going to try.

QUESTION: Mr. President, my question is twofold. Do you believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and it is truth when it says that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Are you personally Jesus Christ as King of your life and as a political leader will you commit your life to make Christ the Prince the standard for all your decisions, whether judicial, legislative, executive or personal?

THE PRESIDENT: The answer, without getting into the details, is yes. I have been, as a part of my own parents' family and as a part of our family, I think, deeply committed. I have especially committed myself, and I think the decisions that I make every day have to be related to a Higher Authority than just what we as humans do.

In my opinion, this is the way that all of us can get the kind of help that is needed and necessary in the future.

I will take one more.

QUESTION: Mr. President, your opponent has brought out that busing, he would do away with busing and spend the money that he is using, that they are presently using for busing to have better education. Now, what is your stand on this, and do you believe that in your proposed budget that you are going to use more money for education?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me answer the last. In the Federal budget that I submitted for fiscal year 1977 in the field of primary and secondary education, I recommended \$3 billion 400 million, which was a \$200 million increase over the current fiscal year. So, yes, we have recommended more money for primary and secondary education.

Number two, I have long said that the aim and objective is quality education. I believe there is a better answer to quality education than forced busing under court order to achieve racial balance.

Thank you very much.