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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION  
UPON HIS ARRIVAL  
TO  
CARSWELL AIR FORCE BASE

12:10 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning.

First, it is nice to be here at Carswell, and just as I arrived I had learned that the outfit here had, within the very last few days, gotten a 100 percent rating on their performance on an operational alert so I want to congratulate the base, the people, the support folks who are doing an outstanding job. This is the kind of defense program that we have--100 percent. I wish we could do that in politics.

Now I will be glad to answer any questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you still think Hubert Humphrey is going to be your Democratic nominee after Mr. Carter's performance yesterday?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say that the momentum for Carter has certainly accelerated and it seems to me unless they go to a broker's convention and a smoke-filled room, that it will probably be Carter.

QUESTION: Mr. President, over in Dallas a couple of weeks ago you thought the Middle East was stabilized. In view of what is happening with the new regime possibly coming into Lebanon, do you think this is taking a further stabilization?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I do, and before I left Washington yesterday I met for about half an hour with Ambassador Dean Brown who just came back from spending about three weeks in Lebanon and he believes that the situation is slowly but surely improving, and that the prospect for the settlement there have increased very significantly. It is still a hard road but the situation has improved and we are optimistic in that it will improve.

QUESTION: Are you still adamant on your vetoing interim funds if they come through?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, when you look at the overall record, in two fiscal years I have recommended for Israel over \$4 billion and correspondingly lower figures for Egypt, for Jordan, for Syria, and it has proved to me there is no need in a 25-month period for any more than the amount of money that I recommended, which was over \$4 billion for Israel.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you accused Ronald Reagan of being simplistic and not understanding the complex national defense issue and not being able to have a retake in the Oval Office. Aren't you engaging in personality politics, which you said you hoped to avoid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I had hoped to avoid it but when I heard and read some of the things that were said, particularly about the security forces of the United States, I think the answer had to be very direct and very specific, and it was this morning.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you accusing him of being unfit to be President of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I wouldn't put it in that term, Phil. I just simply say that the defense capabilities of this country are sufficient, they are unsurpassed, and you have to look at the whole picture rather than little pieces that some people pick out and want to use as an illustration, which if you do is an unfair and I think illogical way to approach our overall defense capability.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if you have to run against Jimmy Carter, how do you size him up? Do you think he will be a tough opponent?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are concentrating, Wally, on our own campaign effort and I really haven't thought about any prospective Democrat. We will meet that head-on after August of 1976.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you worried that Mr. Reagan's win here could produce a domino effect?

THE PRESIDENT: Would you repeat it?

QUESTION: Are you worried that Mr. Reagan's win in Texas could produce a domino effect?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are closing the gap, as I said earlier, in the last 24 hours, and we don't concede Texas to anybody, whether it is in May or whether it is in November.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you talked about Reagan having a simplistic knowledge of foreign policy. Do you believe that Jimmy Carter falls in that same category?

THE PRESIDENT: We will meet that problem when we get through the convention in August and the nomination.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in light of Secretary of State Kissinger's comments about unrelenting opposition to Ian Smith's Government in Rhodesia, does this mean our Nation will be supporting the black nationalist movement in Africa?

THE PRESIDENT: What we have said -- and I will repeat it very specifically -- the United States traditionally, including our own independence, believes in self-determination. It means that we have to guarantee the rights of the minority and we are speaking, of course, to make certain that no foreign, non-African country dominates that great continent, and that includes the Soviet Union or anybody else.

This should be a program on a worldwide scale of helping Africans help themselves, and we are dedicated to, as I said, self-determination and the protection of guaranteeing minority rights.

Thank you all very, very much. It is nice to see you.

END (AT 12:15 P.M. CDT)