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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

BIRMINGHAM MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

2:01 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. It is great to be in Birmingham along with John Buchanan and all of the other fine people that are with the Republican Party and with the President Ford Committee.

It is nice to be here and I will be glad to answer any of your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said that Ronald Reagan is the only Republican that can beat Jimmy Carter in the South. If you are the Republican nominee, will you have a Southern strategy, so to speak?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is best for the country if a candidate for the Presidency has a program to win all over the country. Of course, the Southern region of our great Nation is a vitally important area, economically and politically and otherwise, but I think a President who is going to be President of all the people must get support from all regions of the country, and when I am the nominee of the Republican Party after the Convention in Kansas City, I will make a national appeal to voters all over the country.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how well do you think you will do in the Alabama primary?

THE PRESIDENT: We are always hopeful. I have some outstanding people who are working very hard on my behalf. I have some very strong endorsements from some of the top political people in the State of Alabama. I think I have good programs to get the economy moving again, as it is, with increasing prosperity. I think I have a program that means no American boys are fighting in combat. We are getting all our military personnel by an all-volunteer military force. So when you look at our leadership, our endorsements, our programs and policies, I think we will do quite well in the State of Alabama.

QUESTION: Do you think you will get a large cross-over vote like you did in Texas?

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THE PRESIDENT: I have no way of knowing. Certainly, in Texas there was a very substantial cross-over and we hope that we can get a good vote from all citizens in the State of Alabama.

QUESTION: Governor Reagan says that he is the only Republican who can carry in the South in a race against Jimmy Carter. What is your response to that?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that is an accurate statement. I have been in the South a good many times campaigning for various candidates. I have a good many friends in the South. My policies are aimed at improving the economy all over the United States, including the South. I think I have an excellent chance of winning against any Democratic candidate.

QUESTION: In Indiana you said Mr. Reagan might be, in your words, rash in using the power of the Presidency. What do you mean by that?

THE PRESIDENT: Certainly, when he talks about using military strength first in the settling of the Panama Canal instead of my program which means negotiation first and then utilization of whatever we have to do if negotiations fail, I think that is a rash statement. I think it is a very unacceptable one at this point.

QUESTION: Mr. President, your loss in Texas coupled with a poll showing you are doing poorly in Alabama and Georgia -- do you plan to reorganize your committee to re-elect?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. We have had a strategy right from the beginning that meant we were going to win in Kansas City, and I think without any question of a doubt we will go to Kansas City with enough delegates to win.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will any change in our current relationship in the Panama Canal be made through a formal treaty submitted to the Senate, or will you do it through an Executive agreement?

THE PRESIDENT: Certainly, we would do it in the constitutional way, which means that any treaty would, of course, be submitted to the Senate for ratification and, also, under the unique circumstances that involve Panama, it would be expected that we would also submit it to the Congress as a whole.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can you talk about a possible Southern runningmate? Would any of those possibly be from Alabama?

THE PRESIDENT: We have a wealth of material here in the Republican Party, Alabama included. I think it is premature to start identifying individuals; certainly people from Alabama would not be ruled out automatically.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.