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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

THE ROSE GARDEN

4:05 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: This Wednesday is a little better than a couple we have had. In fact, it is a very good day because we had, I think, an excellent day yesterday in New Jersey. We have a minimum of 65 out of 67 and a distinct possibility that we will get the extra 2 in Ohio, and I just finished talking to Governor Rhodes -- we have 91 out of 97, and one of the districts is very, very close and there is a distinct possibility that we could pick up that one.

So, the net result is we are getting very close to the thousand delegate count. We are 150 or so shy of the necessary 1,130. But, it is getting better and better and we think as we go to the Convention that we will get the necessary 1,130-plus in order to get the nomination on the first ballot.

I will be glad to answer any questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what process will you use to go about getting the uncommitted delegates?

THE PRESIDENT: We are going to maximize our effort, but I don't think we are in a position to discuss the precise procedures as to how we will work with the uncommitted delegates. There are a number there that are honestly making up their mind, and it is our view that we can convince them by using the argument that we did in Ohio.

I am electable and I can help to elect more Republican Members of the House and Senate. Delegates understand that. They want to vote for a winner in November at the Kansas City Convention and they want to pick a nominee that will help elect more Republicans to the House and Senate, and more State legislators.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will that argument hold as well against Jimmy Carter as it would, say, against Hubert Humphrey since Mr. Carter is not from Washington?

THE PRESIDENT: Frankly, I have not thought about just what arguments we will use because, although it looks like Jimmy Carter is going to be the nominee, we take first things first.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter has said he would pardon all Vietnam draft dodgers and draft evaders. Are you planning to review your stand on that or take any new position?

THE PRESIDENT: I answered that in Bowling Green State University the other night when I indicated that in September of 1974 I put forward a program whereby those who had been draft dodgers or draft evaders could come in voluntarily and earn their way back and clear their records. About 20,000 of them, as I recall, did. We extended the time about 90 days beyond the original date, and all of those who wanted to are in the process or have completed it, and I regret that more didn't but I have no plans to go beyond that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you anticipate a series of platform fights leading up to the Convention?

THE PRESIDENT: It is possible, but it is premature to know exactly how that might develop.

QUESTION: Mr. President, assuming you get the nomination, are you willing to engage in televised debates?

THE PRESIDENT: We haven't discussed that at the present time. I would not rule it out or commit myself to it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, our polls, New York Times-CBS poll, in Ohio, indicated many Republicans felt that this battle between you and Mr. Reagan had become divisive and was hurting the party. How do you look at it now? How much damage has been done to the Republican Party as a result of this?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think much damage has been done to the Republican Party. I was very pleased to see on the news last night that Mr. Reagan had indicated that if I won the nomination he would support me, and I have indicated that I have traditionally supported the Republican nominee, and I would again, so at least the two contenders are in agreement, and I think that is healthy. I think it would be reflected in the delegates to the Convention and to the Republicans in all 50 States.

QUESTION: Mr. President, now that the primaries are over, I wonder if you and your people will continue to harp on this thing about Rhodesia, what Mr. Reagan said about it. At this point, aren't you going to be talking practical politics, as you indicated earlier, in talking about the fact that you believe you are electable, instead of going back to Reagan and his remarks on Rhodesia?

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THE PRESIDENT: I think we will use the theme that I used in the State of Ohio. It was very effective. I am electable. I can bring in more Republican Members of the Congress and State legislators. I have a good record. We have done a great deal to make this country a good bit more prosperous today than it was a year ago. We got peace and we have got the trust in the White House that is needed and necessary. We will be talking about affirmative things that I think will help us convince delegates in the Convention and I think it will help us win the election in November.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the count is still very close. Hasn't Governor Reagan given you a tougher run in the primaries than you first expected?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say that it has been a tough contest. Competition has been rough. We expected to win, when we started out, in Kansas City, and we think we will win in Kansas City. We have had some disappointments but, on the other hand, we have done very, very well, such as in Ohio and New Jersey, and I think we will do well in some of the convention States.

QUESTION: But hasn't the Reagan challenge been stronger than you expected when the primaries started in February?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that is probably true, but I don't think that is significant as long as we win.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what does California do to this electability argument? The former California Governor won almost 2 to 1 there. Doesn't that indicate where he is well-known he is also electable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think you could make the same argument in my behalf in the State of Michigan, and the same as far as the State of Ohio. So, it is an argument that we look at from the broadest possible perspective and, when you look at the recent poll that came out Monday -- I think it was the Roper Poll -- it indicated that I was almost 2 to 1 a better candidate from the point of view of the Republicans who were surveyed in that poll.

So, as you look at it from a 50-State point of view, there is no question that many, many more Republicans believe that I am electable and should be the choice of the Convention in Kansas City.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of the fact that Governor Carter now appears to be the sure Democratic nominee, have you begun your process of selecting a Vice President?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not proceeded any further today than we have for the last two or three weeks. We think we have a lot of excellent material. And, as we move further ahead, we will start discussing that in detail, but we have not changed our position today from a week ago in that regard.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, do you contemplate that some smaller States, or the obscure States, will make the decision in the selection of a nominee for the party, for States that have not yet picked their delegation?

THE PRESIDENT: No State is obscure in my mind. Every one of them is very, very vitally important, and we will consider them as such. So, we want all of the delegates from all of the States that we can possibly get, and each one is equally important with the other.

QUESTION: Mr. President, as you have been campaigning you have been expressing your record and your electability. At some point, could we expect you to tell the American people specifically what you would do in your second term as President in terms of programs, goals?

THE PRESIDENT: The goals would be primarily the achievements that we have accomplished in the first 22 months -- maintenance of peace, the need to increase our prosperity and make it more permanent, and the restoration of confidence and trust in the White House which we also have made possible because of the attitude of this Administration. We will get into some of the details of legislative programs, but that is premature at the present time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you say you are electable but recent polls show you running behind Carter. Now, are you concerned about this?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the polls as a whole indicate that I am electable. We have an occasional poll that shows that dip here or a dip there, but if you take the consensus of the polls, I think it proves beyond any doubt that I am electable.

QUESTION: How do you see your chances of running against Carter?

THE PRESIDENT: I think they are good.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Melvin Laird said today that he thinks you have got the nomination in the bag. Do you think it is going to be that easy, and what do your advisers tell you about that?

THE PRESIDENT: I will just say we are going to win on the first ballot. I am delighted that my good friend, Mel, is that optimistic, but I always prepare for the worst and the best will take care of itself, and winning by 1,131 is good but I would like to win by more than that on the first ballot.

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QUESTION: How closely will you monitor the activities of trying to firm up delegates between now and the Convention?

THE PRESIDENT: I think I will be kept up to date on just what the progress is. That is important and I am very interested in it, obviously.

QUESTION: Any personal contact between you and the uncommitted delegates?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not decided yet, Ann.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Nice to see you all.

END (AT 4:16 P.M. EDT)