

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 34

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

12:10 P.M. EDT
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Friday

In the Oval Office
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: We have no set format. I don't know whose turn it is -- AP, UPI.

QUESTION: You have nothing in particular in mind this morning, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I am just glad to see you all.

I feel very, very encouraged and very pleased with the results of the Bicentennial weekend. I was pleasantly surprised at the reaction throughout the country. I think it was well reported by the press that not only in Philadelphia, in Valley Forge, New York and Washington did everything move along extremely well, but it was reported all over the country that there was a real, genuine resurgence of good American feeling toward one another, toward the country, that I think augers for a real good third century. So, we are well on our way, and I think it will continue.

Frank, anything else?

QUESTION: Not right offhand. (Laughter)

QUESTION: In your race for the nomination with Governor Reagan, how do you think you stand now for delegates? Are you confident of a victory, initially?

THE PRESIDENT: I am very confident. The projections clearly indicate to me that when we get to Kansas City we will have the first ballot victory. You can read all the numbers, but when you analyze them, I think, objectively the Ford nomination will prevail on the first ballot.

We have had some very good movement in individual States. We have had good results, of course, in North Dakota. We expect good results next week, and so when we go to Kansas City, I am very confident that we will prevail on the first ballot.

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QUESTION: Who do you want for your Vice Presidential running mate?

THE PRESIDENT: Fran, I don't exclude anybody. We have a wealth of talent, and I think it is premature to winnow that list down. We have to take into consideration a number of factors, the prime one, of course, being an individual to be an excellent President, but there are other factors that have to be taken into consideration.

Until we get closer to the Convention, I think it is too early to make any real speculation.

QUESTION: Would you rule anyone out like--would you rule Mr. Reagan out?

THE PRESIDENT: I repeat, I exclude nobody. I hope that individuals in the meantime will not exclude themselves because we want the best ticket we can get to win in November.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Governor Reagan made the statement when apprised of the Israeli rescue and raid in Uganda, "This is what Americans used to do." One of the hostages, who is an American citizen, said America did not "give a damn about us, Israel freed us."

I wonder, what is your reaction?

THE PRESIDENT: I can assure you that this Administration has taken a firm action wherever we have been confronted with any illegal international action in the past. The best illustration of course is what we did in 1975 in the MAYAGUEZ incident. I think that was a clear warning to any nation that violates international law that this Administration will act swiftly and firmly and, I think, successfully.

QUESTION: If I could follow that up, the State Department said, when asked "What is the United States doing," said that they had contacted numerous Governments, as well as the International Red Cross. What else did we do to compare with the Israeli action?

THE PRESIDENT: We took whatever action we felt was appropriate at that time to indicate our strong feeling against international terrorism, and we asked for the full cooperation of all Governments to make certain that the hostages were freed.

As you know, we indicated to Prime Minister Rabin that we were gratified that the Israelis had taken the very specific action to free the hostages and, at the same time, we reiterated a firm opposition to international terrorism.

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QUESTION: Did we know in advance of that Israeli raid?

THE PRESIDENT: We did not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, is there not concern that if you should win a narrow victory at the Convention and receive the nomination by a small majority, that you will have some difficulty winning the election, being a member of the minority party?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. The competition has been close, controversial, and if you win, you win. I talk very affirmatively about the need and necessity for a unified party. I think we can leave Kansas City with a win and a unified party.

Once we get the nomination, we can start pointing out the distinct differences between the prospective Democratic nominee and myself; we can talk about the record that we have. It is a record that I think will be applauded objectively by 99 and 9/10 percent of the delegates to the Republican Convention.

I think it will appeal to a good many Independents, and I have already had some indications that there are some Democrats who think the record of the Ford Administration is a good one, so we will enter the campaign after the convention with a good opportunity to prevail November 2.

QUESTION: Mr. President, when you met with the Saudi official this morning, did he indicate to you that oil prices will be going up again at the end of the year or did you discuss that?

THE PRESIDENT: There was no discussion of the prospect of any oil price increase. I expressed my appreciation for the action by OPEC in not increasing oil prices in their recent meeting. I pointed out I thought that was in the best interest of the free world and that it would be beneficial, not only to the oil consumers, but the oil producers in the long run.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this morning Tom Curtis, former FEC Chairman, who you know is now working for Ronald Reagan in his campaign, said he feels the FEC should take action, that the White House is getting unfair treatment at Kansas City -- you are getting more rooms -- and specifically, according to Mr. Nofziger, 388 hotel rooms allotted to the Ford campaign and the White House while only 100 rooms are allotted to the Reagan campaign; Ford groups have 650 gallery passes while the Reagan campaign has received only 300. And, because the conventions this time are using tax money, Curtis is saying that the FEC should take some action. How do you feel about it?

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THE PRESIDENT: You have to realize my good friend, Tom Curtis, is a Reagan delegate, so I would expect he would take that point of view. We are living up to the letter and the spirit of the law. The decisions in this case were made by the Republican National Committee. I understand they were made unanimously, and, as I am told, it does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Federal Election Commission.

I reiterate that in every instance where there has been a ruling by the FEC, this Administration has lived up to the letter as well as the spirit.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you plan to, in the interest of party unity, throw the Vice Presidential nomination up to the Convention; not mention any names, your preference, just let the Convention delegates decide?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not made any decision on that, Phil. As I said, I have excluded no one from my consideration as far as a running mate is concerned. Whether that would be a possibility, it is just premature to make any commitment.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what would you like for the International Olympic Committee to do to resolve the dispute between Canada and Taiwan?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is tragic that international politics and foreign policy get involved in international sport competition. I strongly feel that the Olympics are a healthy thing for the world as a whole. Competition between athletes from all countries ought to be stimulated rather than curtailed. So, I hope and trust that the diplomatic problems or the international foreign policy problems can be resolved so that this healthy competition can go on.

QUESTION: Have you done anything about it? Have you contacted the Canadian Government?

THE PRESIDENT: I am being kept abreast of it, but this is a decision that gets involved in Canadian Government decisions on the one hand and the International Olympic Committee on the other. I have expressed myself very clearly that we hope they will continue as broadly based as possible.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you believe that the Israeli violation of Uganda national sovereignty was justified?

THE PRESIDENT: The Department of State and our representatives to the United Nations will set forth our position very clearly in the debate that I think begins today, on one or more resolutions before the Security Council. I am told that our position is a firm one, on good legal grounds. I will wait and let that be expressed by them during the debate.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, can we talk about the delegates once again? Do you believe that before you get to Kansas City you are going to have more than you need to get a first ballot victory, that you can cite some names?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we will, as I said a moment ago, have enough delegates to win on the first ballot, which I think infers certainly that we know who will be voting for President Ford's nomination.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can you tell us what you learned recently about the extent of the problems on the Alaska Pipeline and what the penalties might be in terms of cost and delay?

THE PRESIDENT: I got a very complete report late yesterday afternoon from the Secretary of the Interior, and the Secretary of Transportation. I think you know that the Under Secretary of Transportation John Barnum is either leaving or has left to go up there with a group of technical people to make an on-the-spot evaluation of the several reports as to the number of welds that are allegedly defective. I am going to be kept constantly advised as to what they recommend as to a procedure and as to the certainty that the pipeline meets all of the Department of Transportation's regulations for interstate pipeline safety.

We have not gotten into the added cost, whatever it might be, but I am confident that I will be fully advised at all times.

QUESTION: Have you talked with any people from the Justice Department as to the possibility of criminality involved in falsification of records?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a matter for the Department of Justice to determine. I have not personally communicated with the Department. I think they have to make any judgments over there, not myself.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will Southern support be vital, and will it be absolutely necessary for your election in November?

THE PRESIDENT: I hope to get support in all 50 States, Dick. We don't have any regional strategy. I have said repeatedly that I expect to run a national campaign and that certainly infers we want support from the South; we want support from the other regions throughout the country.

QUESTION: Do you think you can win without a good hunk of the South?

THE PRESIDENT: As I said, we want Southern support and I think we will get Southern support. That will contribute to our victory in November.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter has been holding auditions for a running mate. Do you have plans to do anything like that?

THE PRESIDENT: I think I know most of the people that are among those that we know would be a potential running mate. I am sure that I will have consultations, but we have not set out any specific routine for it.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate public announcements of people coming in for briefing sessions?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't anticipate that kind of a routine, so to speak. As I said, I know all of the people quite intimately. I know their records. I know what they believe in. So, I don't have to go through that experience such as Governor Carter is going through, because I don't think he knows some of these people that he is considering as well as I know all of the potential Republican running mates.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I got the impression from what you said to Phil Jones that you might still be seriously considering throwing that choice open to the Convention, or at least giving them a list of names. Are you seriously contemplating doing that?

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't mean to infer the conclusion you came to. I simply said that we have not made any firm commitment as to what procedure we would take at the time of the Convention.

I think a Presidential nominee ought to make his wishes known to the delegates. How he proceeds after that, we just haven't made a final decision of it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in light of your expressed displeasure over the decision by HEW regarding father-son/mother-daughter breakfasts, have you given any thought to perhaps curtailing the powers of the Office of Civil Rights in that Department?

THE PRESIDENT: We have not given any thought to curtailing their overall responsibility. But, as President, I have a responsibility to review any decisions that they make, and when I saw that decision I was shocked. I go a little stronger than Ron reported yesterday, and I took immediate action because I think that was a very wrong decision. If there are other decisions that I disagree with in the future, I will exercise my Presidential prerogative to suspend them or to change them. They have a responsibility to carry out what they think is the right determination, but if I disagree, I will certainly take affirmative action in the future, as I did in this case.

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QUESTION: Your reaction to the WPI figures, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I think those WPI figures of .4 percent fall within the guidelines that we have established. If you annualize that figure, it is less than 5 percent, so it is within the overall expectations that we have for the wholesale prices.

QUESTION: Mr. President, after you have, through this campaign, made some rather harsh observations about Ronald Reagan, how could you seriously consider him as your running mate, a man who could become the President? You have had some pretty tough things to say about him. I can't quite see how you could possibly consider him, if you feel that way.

THE PRESIDENT: I think we all have to understand in a very controversial political campaign you make a point, and sometimes with some political license. We have done that historically in this country. We can go back to the days of President Kennedy and the then Vice President Johnson. No one under any circumstances would have foreseen that that team would end up representing the Democratic Party.

All I am saying is that when you take a look at all of the Republican potentials, including Ronald Reagan, I think they all ought to be included for consideration.

QUESTION: But would it be fair to say that you certainly would not be as comfortable with Ronald Reagan as with some others?

THE PRESIDENT: Phil, I am not going to get into degrees that are comfortable (Laughter) with potential Republican candidates. When I pick that candidate, I expect him to be a good running mate and a good Vice President.

QUESTION: But you said there are no retakes in the Oval Office, indicating that he does not have the experience to handle this office. It just seems that you feel, or have indicated, that he is not qualified to be President.

THE PRESIDENT: I think when we pick the candidate, he will be a qualified person to be Vice President.

QUESTION: What can you tell us this morning about the health of Mrs. Ford? Is she feeling all right? Also, have you been in touch with the Nixon family about the former First Lady?

THE PRESIDENT: Mrs. Ford came down with a very bad cold yesterday following the church service at the Cathedral. She had a good night. She is going to take it easy for a day or so, and there is no concern, just a typical cold.

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I stopped and saw Dr. Lukash when I came to the office this morning. He had not gotten any overnight reports on the condition of Mrs. Nixon. He is going to report to me as soon as he gets any information from her doctor.

QUESTION: Did you speak to President Nixon?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I called President Nixon.

QUESTION: Can you tell us something of what he told you?

THE PRESIDENT: He reported the sequence more or less as they had been reported in the press. I extended to him on behalf of Betty and myself our affection and best wishes for Mrs. Nixon's full and complete recovery.

QUESTION: Did you talk about politics?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all.

QUESTION: Mr. President, as I understand it, the Republican National Committee is supposed to be neutral until there is a nominee; am I correct in that assumption?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a valid assumption.

QUESTION: Thank you.

Now then, why is Mrs. Smith going to the Convention as a Ford delegate?

THE PRESIDENT: Because she has an opportunity, like any other citizen of this country, to run and express her personal views. She is running the National Committee on a very nonpartisan basis between my opponent and myself.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could we talk about the Alaska Pipeline? Another time -- you are from the Middle West and when the Pipeline Act was passed in Congress --

THE PRESIDENT: I voted for it.

QUESTION: Okay. There was quite a debate, though, about building a trans-Canada pipeline that would deliver oil to the Middle West where it is needed. There is still talk about that. Would you support legislation to build a pipeline from Valdez across Canada to the Middle West?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe that is an active possibility. I think you are referring to the possibility of a gas pipeline.

QUESTION: They were going to double-truck it, apparently.

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THE PRESIDENT: From Northern Canada or Northern Alaska to the Middle West is one of several alternatives. There are other alternatives that would involve bringing the gas down to the Gulf of Alaska. That matter is before the Federal Power Commission at the present time. It is also before -- in one way or another -- a comparable agency in the Canadian Government. There is legislation that is being sponsored which I think is good legislation, that would expedite the determination as to which route is the preferable one. It would be legislation much like that which was approved for the delivery of Alaskan oil -- If that gas is badly needed in the United States -- and I am not saying on the West Coast or the Middle West -- but I think a decision has to be expedited, and so I would favor such legislation which would expedite the determination by the proper authorities as to which route was the better of the two or which is the best, if there are more than two.

QUESTION: Mr. President, since this is an election year, I wonder if you think there is not much chance of getting startling developments in the area of foreign affairs, such as the SALT agreement or MBFR, or in any other area? Do you think it is very difficult to conduct negotiations at a time when frankly the occupancy of the White House is uncertain for next year? Are we sort of at a standstill for the rest of the year in foreign affairs?

THE PRESIDENT: I have said specifically, as far as SALT is concerned, if we can get a good agreement I will make that agreement regardless of any political consequences. We are in the process of thoroughly analyzing our last proposal, the Soviet Union's reaction or last proposal, and if we can move forward on a good SALT agreement I certainly will push for it, because I think it is in the national interest and in the best interest of mankind as a whole. So, politics won't enter into any decision, as far as SALT is concerned. I know of no other major areas that would have any political consideration as far as foreign policy.

QUESTION: How about the SALT agreement?

THE PRESIDENT: I intend to push for it. I am not passing judgment as to whether it will come or won't come, but we are working on it and I intend to push for it. Whether we can achieve an agreement or not is uncertain. But, it is in the best interest of the United States and mankind as a whole if we can get the right agreement. And I will do it regardless of the political atmosphere that may prevail here because of our election.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can we pin something down? Is Ronald Reagan qualified to be President?

THE PRESIDENT: I said the person I select for the Vice Presidency will be qualified, and I don't exclude anybody.

QUESTION: Therefore, he is qualified?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a fair conclusion -- (Laughter) -- if he is the nominee. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you satisfied with the way your campaign committee has performed through the primary and convention State season, and after the Convention do you foresee at this point any substantial reorganization of your committee?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see any substantial reorganization. I have said, through Ron and otherwise, that Rog Morton is going to stay on. We intend to add people to the top echelon over there as the need arises for particular jobs that must be handled, such as the Convention, such as other responsibilities. I see no anticipated major reorganization. Like any other organization, you look back in retrospect as a Monday morning quarterback you might have done a little better here and there, but I think the President Ford Committee, considering all the problems, has done a good job.

QUESTION: Do you want Stu Spencer to stay on?

THE PRESIDENT: I certainly do. I think Stu Spencer is an extremely able person. He has done a good job.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what was your reaction to the Supreme Court's decision on the death penalty, and do you approve of the way they are going now?

THE PRESIDENT: I have stated on a number of occasions that I support the death penalty at the Federal level for espionage, treason, et cetera. I support the death penalty for the kind of crimes that involve murder, et cetera. I support the direction in which the Supreme Court is going.

QUESTION: Mr. President, one more question on Mr. Reagan, if you don't mind. At the end of your coming term -- I presume that you are going to be elected -- Mr. Reagan will be 70 years old. Do you still think he would be qualified at that time to replace you as President?

THE PRESIDENT: I would not speculate as to who the Republican candidate might be in 1980.

QUESTION: It has become a custom for the Vice President to sort of --

THE PRESIDENT: I can only say I don't intend to be there, the candidate in 1980, (Laughter) but I expect to be the nominee in 1976 and I expect to hold office until January 20, 1981.

QUESTION: Mr. President, to what extent do you personally get on the telephone and call delegates?

THE PRESIDENT: I do it occasionally.

QUESTION: Once a night? Twice a night?

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THE PRESIDENT: I don't keep a poll of it or a count, but I like to talk to people.

QUESTION: What do you say to them?

THE PRESIDENT: I thank them for their interest in the political system. I thank them that they are active and participating, and I compliment them on the job that I know they will do in Kansas City.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END

(AT 12:40 P.M. EDT)