

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 35

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

1:30 P.M. EDT
July 19, 1976
Monday

On the North Lawn
At the White House
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Before responding to your questions, I have two announcements to make.

First, I am sending later this week a message to the Congress calling for prompt action on a number of legislative programs that Congress must act on before adjournment. I am recommending affirmative action, as quickly as possible, on my further tax reduction proposals, on the remaining portions of my energy independence recommendations, on my stronger anti-crime proposals, and, of course, general revenue sharing.

It seems to me that before Congress adjourns, it must undertake a vigorous legislative program if it is to maintain its credibility with the American people.

Secondly, I am sending to the Congress today a recommendation which would further advance our efforts to restore public confidence in the integrity of all three branches of the Federal Government, including the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, and the Judicial Branch. It is vitally important -- I am determined and I trust the Congress is -- to insure that those who hold public office maintain the highest possible standards and are fully accountable to the American people for their behavior while in public office. I hope the Congress will act very promptly on this legislation.

I will be glad to answer any questions.

Helen?

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think that you have the Presidential nomination now locked up and, if not, do you think you will have it by the end of the week?

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THE PRESIDENT: I am very encouraged with the results over the weekend. I believe that we are getting very close right now to the magic number of 1,130. I am confident by the time we get to Kansas City, we will have 1,130-plus.

QUESTION: How many delegates do you think you have now?

THE PRESIDENT: The best estimate, I think, is 1,103 and we expect some more good news this week. Therefore, by the time we get to Kansas City, I am confident we will have over 1,130.

QUESTION: Mr. President, is Governor Carter beatable?

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

Q And if so, how?

THE PRESIDENT: By the kind of an affirmative program that we have developed in the last 23 months here in the White House under the Ford Administration. I intend to have an affirmative campaign based on the results of turning the economy around, achieving the peace and the restoration of public trust in the White House, itself.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter has set forth some of his beliefs on foreign policy. Can you tell us whether you think there are major differences with what you are doing now in foreign policy and what are they?

THE PRESIDENT: Since I strongly believe that our foreign policy has been a successful one -- we have achieved the peace, we have the military capability and the diplomatic skill to maintain that peace -- I don't see, from what I have read, any legitimate complaints or objections by any of my Democratic friends, whether they are the candidates for the highest office or the Members of the Congress.

QUESTION: Mr. President, sir, do you feel that the selection of Walter Mondale as Vice President is going to change your selection of a Vice Presidential candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: I will make my choice known on the Vice Presidency based on the best person that could serve as President of the United States. My decision will not be predicated on my Democratic opponent's recommendation of Senator Mondale.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Carter took a month to select his Vice Presidential nominee. Will you be able to take very long? Will you have enough time to consider?

THE PRESIDENT: I have been thinking about this matter for some time. I know all of the individuals who are being considered very well. I have worked with them, known about them. I have studied carefully their records. Therefore, it won't be a last-minute analysis. It will be one based on a good many years of experience and opportunities to know how they performed in public office or otherwise. So, it is not going to be a last-minute decision where we winnow out the individuals in a 48-hour period.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you assess the Carter-Mondale ticket?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it was obviously the choice of the Democratic Convention, which was well organized and well put together and well controlled. It is a ticket that can be beaten by an affirmative approach that I intend to have in setting forth the improvements that I have made domestically and in foreign policy during the time that I have been honored to be President of the United States.

It is a rather typical Democratic ticket when you add up the platform, its endorsement of the record of the Democratic Congress and the comments that I have heard, both in the acceptance speeches and in subsequent observations.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

QUESTION: You said that the ticket -- on Saturday, I believe -- that the ticket tries to be all things to all people. Just what do you mean by that?

THE PRESIDENT: If you look at the ticket itself, if you look at the platform and if you look at the record of the Democratic Congress, you can't help but come to the conclusion that they want to spend a lot of money on the one hand and they talk on the other about some restraint in Federal spending.

You can take almost any one of the many issues, and they are on both sides of the issue. So, I think it fits in very precisely with my observation that I made on Saturday.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, what is the biggest single issue between you and Governor Carter?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to discuss this campaign from that point of view. I think it is important for me to act affirmatively and indicating the results that we have accomplished. I will let Mr. Carter decide the issues where he has some differences.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if you do go to the Convention with the number of delegates that you think you will go with now, is there anything else at the Convention that could really divide the Republicans there?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope not because the Republican Party does have to be as unified as possible if we are going to win the election in 1976. I think that unity can be achieved at the Convention in Kansas City, and I will maximize my effort to accomplish that result. Therefore, we will have the job of picking the nominee and I expect to be the nominee. We have to write the platform. I hope the platform will be one that all can support, and not divisive. When we leave, we, as a party, must be united individually and collectively.

QUESTION: Mr. President, isn't that, sir, going to be easier said than done? These Reagan people are very committed. They have worked very hard. It is going to take more than just going into that Convention, isn't it, and saying, "Just come on and be on our side." What are you going to say to them?

THE PRESIDENT: I think these delegates, all of them, the ones that support me and the ones that support Mr. Reagan, have a philosophical identity. They do represent delegates, one group for me and the other for Mr. Reagan. But the identity of the philosophy is such that I think when the Convention is concluded, they can be together on the need and necessity for a candidate who will put forth their philosophy against that of the opposition.

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QUESTION: Wouldn't they be a lot happier if you put Mr. Reagan on the ticket with you? There is going to be a lot of pressure on you to do that, is there not?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to make the judgment here as to who will be the Vice Presidential nominee. We will have a good Vice Presidential candidate and, as I said before, we are not going to exclude anybody.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Democrats have already signaled what direction they are going to go by trying to tie your Administration with close ties to the Nixon Administration. How do you intend to handle that problem in the campaign and shed that yoke?

THE PRESIDENT: I am going to use the Ford record of 23 months, which is a good one, in turning the economy around, and achieving the peace and maintaining the peace and the restoration of public confidence in the White House, and hopefully the restoration of public confidence in the other two branches of the Federal Government.

QUESTION: Excuse me. As a follow-up, inasmuch as you kept on such former Nixon intimates as Secretaries Kissinger, Simon and Butz and Messrs. Morton, Greenspan, Scowcroft and Rumsfeld, isn't their branding of your Administration accurate?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all because I have made the final decisions in each case.

QUESTION: Mr. President, does the United States have evidence or information that President Qadhafi of Libya is financing, planning, encouraging and serving as the central point of an international terrorist organization and conspiracy?

THE PRESIDENT: We do know that the Libyan Government has in many ways done certain things that might have stimulated terrorist activity, but I don't think we ought to discuss any evidence that we have that might prove or disprove that.

QUESTION: In the light of what you had to say about the Israeli rescue mission, or mission in Uganda, if you have any reason to believe that the Libyan Government is encouraging terrorist operations on an international basis, why, in the sort of classical phrase, why isn't the United States doing something about it?

THE PRESIDENT: We are working in the United Nations, we are working with many Governments in trying to put forward a very strong, anti-terrorist effort in order to stop this kind of very unwarranted, unjustified action and will continue our efforts in that regard.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to follow up on Ronald Reagan as a possible running mate. I am sure you read the paper every morning, and there is a quote in here today from Governor Reagan saying, "Once you become the Vice-Presidential candidate, you have no authority over yourself," and he says, "I have expressed disagreement with a great many things with this Administration. No, there is just no way, I wouldn't do it."

Doesn't that really close the door on Ronald Reagan as a running mate?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to pass judgment on what his attitude may be. I will simply reaffirm and reaffirm very strongly, I am not excluding any Republican from consideration as a potential running mate.

QUESTION: Mr. President, has the United States decided, with or without the consent of Germany, France and Britain, not to extend any economic aid to Italy if the Communists join the Government in Italy?

THE PRESIDENT: I have said on several occasions that the United States Government, under this Administration, would be very disturbed by Communist participation in the Government of Italy. For one reason, it would have a very, I think, unfortunate, impact on NATO which is, of course, a very vital part of our international defense arrangement. The United States does have apprehension on a broader basis for Communist participation in the Italian Government.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of Jimmy Carter's strength in the South and the Northeastern industrial States, possibly of crucial importance, do you now think it may have been unwise for the Republican high command and you to have told Vice President Nelson Rockefeller to get lost?

THE PRESIDENT I certainly don't use those words when I describe the situation that you have sought to so dramatically describe. (Laughter)

The decision by Nelson Rockefeller was one that he made himself. He has been an outstanding Vice President. He has been a close personal friend and adviser and, I will, of course, abide by his decision, as I would by any others.

But, I repeat what I said a moment ago, in my looking around for a Vice Presidential running mate, I am not excluding anybody.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, what do you feel your major problems are now to hold the nomination?

THE PRESIDENT: Getting a few more delegates.

QUESTION: Where specifically are the problems?

THE PRESIDENT: There are around 100 uncommitted delegates on a pretty wide geographical basis. Of course, Hawaii has 18, Mississippi has 30, and the others are spread through a number of other States. So, we are going to make a maximum effort to convince individual delegates who are uncommitted, as well as those two major States that have not yet committed themselves.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a question on international trade. The American textile industry is very concerned about the increase in imports of textiles from the People's Republic of China. They would like you to negotiate a bilateral agreement with Peking. What is your view on that? Are you doing anything about it?

THE PRESIDENT: I made a statement about three months ago that fully covers that. If you will refer back to that, it will give you a detailed answer.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can you tell us some of the criteria that you will be using in selecting a Vice President? You have said here today that you will consider the Vice Presidential nominee only on his basis to become President should something happen to you, but will there be other criteria as well?

THE PRESIDENT: That is the principal one, of course, and any other criteria would have to be secondary to that. But, other criteria might be age, compatibility with my own philosophy, the experience both in domestic and international affairs. There are a whole raft of potential criteria that I think have to be put into the formula.

QUESTION: Let me ask you, if I can, then, about the process. As you know, Jimmy Carter had a well-publicized audition, if you will, of various candidates. Will you ask the people you have in mind to meet with you either here at the White House or a place of their choice so you can discuss with them their philosophy of Government and any personal differences you may have?

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THE PRESIDENT: Over the years I have done that with all or most of the people that are being considered, so I don't think we have to go through the similar kind routine that Governor Carter went through.

As I understand it, he had never met several of the people that he considered. So, I could really understand why he went through that process. Because of my experience and knowledge about all of the individuals that I think are being considered, I don't think that kind of a process has to be carried out.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I may follow up on the question of Italy, since it is possibly related to other European countries, is there an American formula, should the Communists go to power in Italy, that will be applied?

THE PRESIDENT: We aren't going to dictate any formula to the Government of Italy or to the people of Italy. That is a decision for them to make. But, I have expressed our views concerning Communist involvement in that Government as far as its impact on NATO.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can we ask you about the swine flu program? We understand it is in jeopardy now. The insurance companies will not insure the pharmaceutical companies which are making up the batch of vaccine. What can you do about it, can the Government supply insurance?

THE PRESIDENT: Last week the Secretary of HEW and Dr. Cooper met with the four manufacturers and their legal counsel. I got a report Friday from Secretary Mathews. He was more optimistic than some of the press stories seemed to indicate. I have not talked to him today, but we are going to find a way, either with or without the help of Congress, to carry out their program that is absolutely essential, a program that was recommended to me unanimously by 25 or 30 of the top medical people in this particular field.

So, we are going to find a way, and I think we will eventually do it, and I expect the full cooperation of the industry and all other parties involved.

QUESTION: Mr. President, that Watergate reform bill, the Senate version of it goes to the floor today. Until last week the Administration, I gather, was very much opposed to it. Now you are in with a major proposal to change it. Can you tell us how the Administration came up with these proposals at the 11th hour?

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THE PRESIDENT: The Administration has had many reservations about several of the provisions in the bill that is on the floor of the Senate at the present time. One, the Senate bill provides, as we understand it -- and we have gone into it with some outstanding legal scholars -- an unconstitutional method of the appointment of a Special Prosecutor.

So, what we have recommend is a completely constitutional method of selecting a Special Prosecutor, one that would call for a Special Prosecutor recommended by the President, confirmed by the Senate for a three-year term with that particular Special Prosecutor being ineligible to serve other than the first three years.

That is definitely a constitutional way to have a Special Prosecutor who would have criminal authority over any allegations made against a President, a Vice President, high executive officials, all Members of Congress and those involved in the Judiciary.

Our reservations was not as to the thrust but as to the constitutionality of several provisions, including the one I have just described.

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QUESTION: What is your proposal?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it is our proposal that we feel would accomplish the job of restoring public confidence in all three branches of the Federal Government and do it in a Constitutional way.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in his acceptance speech, Senator Mondale specifically attacked you for your pardon of Richard Nixon and received prolonged applause from the people in the Hall. And later, Mr. Carter said it was an issue that ran very deep in this country. Do you consider your pardon of Mr. Nixon a liability?

THE PRESIDENT: I decided to grant the pardon in the national interest. At that time, the United States was faced with serious economic problems and we were still involved in a long and difficult war in Southeast Asia. We have very important matters to face and to solve. We could not be involved in the Nixon matter and concentrate fully on the more important matters. I decided in the national interest. I would do it again.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will you tell me, sir, what it is that you are accomplishing when you unite both wings of the party, when it is widely recognized that the party is a minority party in American politics and how do you win an election that way?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are going to unite the Republican Party and appeal to independent voters and a number of Democrats, just as the Republicans did in 1968 and 1972.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in connection with the pardon, in both Senator Mondale's speech and in Jimmy Carter's speech, there seemed to be a linkage between the pardon and Watergate, itself. Do you see any such linkage, number one, and secondly, do you think that Watergate should be an issue in the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I granted the pardon because I thought it was in the national interest. I think the American people will make the decision, not me, myself, whether it will be an issue or not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you expect a rules fight at the Convention that will allow some delegates to abstain on the first ballot and possibly the second, second ballot?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, the Justice Amendment which we are proposing would require that all delegates vote according to the laws under which they were selected and I think that is a very proper amendment to carry out the wishes of the people that supported those individuals at the time they were chosen.

QUESTION: Can I follow up, sir? Do you have an indication from the Reagan people that they will not try and change the Justice Amendment?

THE PRESIDENT: To my knowledge, we have not consulted with them.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how many Vice Presidential possibilities do you have in mind?

THE PRESIDENT: Quite a few.

QUESTION: Like maybe a half dozen, a dozen?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to get into the numbers game. We have a fine, fine array of talent in the Republican Party and maybe elsewhere, and so we will just keep that open until we make the final choice.

QUESTION: When will you make that choice?

THE PRESIDENT: You heard me correctly.

QUESTION: Do your comments on the Vice Presidency here today rule out any possibility you will declare the nomination open and let the Convention in Kansas City decide the Vice Presidential selection?

THE PRESIDENT: I will certainly make a recommendation and I hope the Convention would follow my recommendation.

QUESTION: Mr. President, since you have known all of the people involved as a potential Vice President so long and so well, is it possible you have made your decision and are delaying the announcement until the Convention?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can you tell us what his answer is?

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THE PRESIDENT: Use your imagination.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Governor Carter has said that if the Arabs were to impose another oil embargo, he would treat that as an economic declaration of war and would cut off all U.S. trade with the Arab nations. What do you think of that proposal?

THE PRESIDENT: We have been able, through diplomatic successes, to avoid the possibility of a Middle Eastern War and thereby avoided the possibility of an oil embargo. I am confident that the Ford Administration successes, diplomatically, in the Middle East, will preclude any such situation as was indicated by Mr. Carter.

If you are doing things right, if you have the trust of Arab nations, as well as Israel, I don't think we have to look forward to either a Middle Eastern war or an oil embargo.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, a question on the Olympics. Now that Taiwan and the African nations have pulled out, what is your assessment of the situation and what changes would you like to see made in the next Olympics?

THE PRESIDENT: I am very proud of the successes I read about of the American team there yesterday. They did very, very well in the 100-meter freestyle and several other events, and I think the American team has done well and will continue to do well.

Q Has it been overpoliticized?

THE PRESIDENT: We have tried to keep the athletic competition at the international level away from being pawns in international politics. We did our very best to achieve that result and the net result was, with some unfortunate circumstances, that the athletes are able to compete, and I am proud of the American successes.

QUESTION: Mr. President, will your race with Jimmy Carter be a conservative versus a liberal race? What is the difference between your philosophy and Mr. Carter's in those terms?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to pass judgment on my opponent's campaign. We are going to run our own campaign, which is one of a record of accomplishment in foreign policy, domestic policy and the restoration of trust in the White House. What they do is for them to decide.

QUESTION: You cannot then describe Carter as a liberal?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to pin a label on anybody. I am going to just say that we have done a good job and on the basis of doing a good job, I think the American people will want the same kind of a job done for the next four years.

QUESTION: Mr. President, when you were Vice President you said that you would not employ anything such as CREEP, as President Nixon had, that you would have no separate committee. Now we understand there will be a President Ford election committee and you will not be relying entirely on the Republican National Committee.

THE PRESIDENT: I think that is caused by the Election Reform Act that was passed late in 1974. When I made that speech out in Chicago -- I think sometime in 1973 or early 1974 -- that election law had not been enacted. Once that law was enacted, it does require that you maintain a National Committee and that the candidate for the Presidency have a separate organization.

So, as much as I might want to put the two together, it is precluded by the law itself.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Senator Mondale says that you don't have the intelligence to be a good President. What do you think?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the American people will judge that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, can we assume that you will see all the noncommitted delegates by the time the convention begins?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope I could, but I can't categorically promise that. I would like to, definitely.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Supreme Court recently handed down another decision on abortion essentially strengthening the first one. What does this do to your position that you would prefer a constitutional amendment turning it back to the States? Have you given up hope now for that?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see how that recommendation on my part is undercut by the recent decisions of the Supreme Court. I do not believe in abortion on demand. I do think you have a right to have an abortion where the life of the mother is involved, where there was a rape. I don't go along with those who advocate an amendment that would be so ironclad you couldn't under any circumstances have an abortion.

I reiterate what I have said on a number of occasions. I think an amendment which permits the voters in a State to decide whether in that State they want or don't want, is a proper way to give the people of this country or in their respective States the decision-making power.

QUESTION: Mr. President, don't you think the Supreme Court decision is going to make it more difficult to get that amendment, however?

THE PRESIDENT: Not necessarily.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you have any comment one way or another on that recent shake-up in the FBI on the Kelley dismissal of Mr. Callahan?

THE PRESIDENT: That was a decision by the Attorney General and by the FBI Director. Mr. Callahan was not a Presidential appointee so it was handled by the proper authorities.

QUESTION: Mr. President, presumably you watched a little bit of the Democratic National Convention on television. If so, would you tell us how Jimmy Carter came across to you as a personality, as a potential campaigner and as an opponent?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I really had any impression of him. (Laughter)

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QUESTION: You didn't watch enough to get an impression of him?

THE PRESIDENT: I was pretty busy.

QUESTION: Mr. President, all 67 members of the New Jersey delegation are already in your column.

THE PRESIDENT: I hope.

QUESTION: Why are you bringing them down here this afternoon to a private meeting from which the press has been barred?

THE PRESIDENT: I am inviting them down because I want to meet them personally. Just as I said a few moments ago, I would like very much to have the opportunity of meeting all of the delegates and alternates to the National Convention, and this is a good way for me to do with the New Jersey delegation as I have with the other delegations.

QUESTION: What will be the nature of this meeting and do you have any thoughts about the exclusion of the press from --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't know until a few moments ago that members of the press were excluded.

QUESTION: Can we come?

THE PRESIDENT: We have had a number of such meetings, and the question never came up from the press before, and I just don't see why we should make an exception here.

QUESTION: Mr. President, why are you down so far in the polls when you are pitted against Jimmy Carter?

THE PRESIDENT: The only poll that really counts is the one that is going to come on November 2, when the voters of this country decide in all 50 States, and I will rely on that one.

QUESTION: But how can you account for the preferences there?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we should analyze the ups and downs of periodic public opinion polls. The real one that counts -- and that is the one that is going to decide this great election -- is the one that comes November 2.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. It has been very pleasant out here.