

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 36

of the
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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September 8, 1976
Wednesday

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

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning.

I have a very short opening statement and then we will get to the questions.

I met this morning with Secretary Kissinger to discuss his report on his meetings with Prime Minister Vorster and with European leaders. On the basis of this report, I believe that good progress has been made on the problems concerning Southern Africa.

It is important to understand that in this diplomatic process now unfolding, the United States is offering its good offices as an intermediary. We are willing to present ideas on how progress can be achieved, but we are not -- and I emphasize not -- trying to develop a specific American plan.

We have three objectives: First, to prevent an escalation of the violence which in time could threaten our national security; second, to realize popular aspirations while guaranteeing minority rights and insuring economic progress; third, to resist the intervention in the African situation by outside forces.

In his discussions with Prime Minister Vorster, the Secretary put forward some ideas conveyed to the United States by black African leaders, and Prime Minister Vorster gave us his reactions. As a result of these discussions, Assistant Secretary Schaufele is currently in Africa discussing the situation.

On the basis of his report, I will decide whether further progress can be made through a visit by Secretary Kissinger to Africa, starting with black African countries most concerned. We want to create the opportunities and conditions for all races to live side-by-side.

The United States cannot solve by itself these complicated problems. We need the continued goodwill and dedication of the parties involved.

The process that is now beginning is an extremely important one. It is extremely complicated. There is no guarantee of success. But, I believe the United States must now make a major effort because it is the right thing to do. It is in our national interest and it is in the interest of world peace.

I will be glad to answer any questions.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, when you selected Mr. Dole as your running mate, did you make a thorough check of his finances over and beyond, independently of what he gave you, and how was that done? Was it done through Justice, or where?

THE PRESIDENT: The Office of White House Counsel made a very thorough investigation of all of the individuals who were being considered for the office of Vice President. That was done by demanding that they send to us various information concerning their finances and related matters.

Subsequent to that information being furnished, a member of my staff at the Office of the White House Counsel interrogated the individuals who were being considered, including Senator Dole. As a result of that interrogation and information voluntarily supplied by Senator Dole, it was concluded by the Office of the White House Counsel that all things were in order.

QUESTION: Mr. President, have we gotten a fair sample of your campaign this week, or do you have something else in mind for the future?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say at the outset, Mr. Cormier, that I decided a long time ago -- in fact, when I made my first announcement that I was a candidate -- that the principal responsibility I had was that of being President of the United States, and I intend to carry out that responsibility.

Secondly, we have a campaign strategy that will unfold in the days and weeks ahead. It is a strategy that we will adhere to and it is one that has been thoroughly worked out and definitely determined, and you will see how it evolves in the time ahead.

QUESTION: Mr. President, was it your suggestion that the first debate be held in Philadelphia and, if so, why?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, I wanted the debates to start today and we weren't too particular where the location might be. We are certainly in agreement with Philadelphia being the first site.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter said today your position on abortion and his are fundamentally the same. Do you agree with that? And, secondly, do you think the issue should be debated at all in the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the Democratic platform and the Republican platform on the issue of abortion are quite different. I subscribe to the Republican platform and Governor Carter subscribes to the Democratic platform. His position and mine are not identical. My position is that of the Republican platform and I will stick with it.

QUESTION: But that was not your position before.

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THE PRESIDENT: I think -- if I might correct you, Ms. Thomas -- the Republican platform is my platform. It is one that coincides with my long-held view.

QUESTION: Do you think there should be a Constitutional amendment against abortion?

THE PRESIDENT: I have had the position for some time that there should be a Constitutional amendment that would permit the individual States to make the decision based on a vote of the people of each of the States.

Mr. Rogers?

QUESTION: Mr. President, are we any closer to a second SALT agreement with the Russians and, if so, what are the prospects for such an agreement before the election?

THE PRESIDENT: We are continuing to work on the negotiations for a SALT II agreement. A good agreement would be in the best interest of the American people and the world as a whole. The decision on whether such an agreement is signed will have no relevance whatsoever to this current political campaign. We hope that such an agreement can be achieved as soon as possible.

QUESTION: What would you say the prospects are, please, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I think they are gradually improving, but we have some very difficult problems yet to resolve.

QUESTION: Mr. President, don't you feel there should be a law that limits what an incumbent President can do in the way of spending time, spending money, and use of employees of the White House and vehicles and other taxpayers' resources on his campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Congress has made its decision in that regard, Sarah, and I will, of course, always abide by the laws passed by the Congress.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you feel that you are in any way perhaps abusing the power of this office by controlling the media, to use the media as it were to make statements daily on one subject or another?

THE PRESIDENT: I apologize if I am using the American press. I am trying to do the job as President of the United States and I hope that between the American press and the President we can convey important information to the American people.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Governor Carter and Senator Mondale and Labor Leader George Meany have all in recent speeches, in criticizing your economic record, referred to the Nixon-Ford Administration, thus lumping the two together.

Would you prefer to run on your own economic record rather than being associated with the Nixon economic record, specifically imposition of wage price controls?

THE PRESIDENT: The Ford record is the record that I will run on, as far as foreign policy is concerned. To take the particular matter that you mentioned, I have consistently said and I reiterate, that wage and price controls will not be imposed by this Administration. This Administration has had a good record in handling serious and difficult problems in the domestic economic field.

We have added four million new people working in the last 12 months, 500,000 more in the last two months, so I will stand on my record, which I think is a good one.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been some questions in the last few days about Senator Dole. Have you had any contact with him on that subject, in particular about the control of money or have you attempted to satisfy yourself anew about this, or perhaps your staff?

THE PRESIDENT: The statement made this morning by Mr. Wild, I think clarifies the situation very dramatically. Senator Dole was in the Cabinet meeting this morning and my staff has been in contact with his and we are satisfied today, as we were at the time we made the initial investigation of his campaign finances.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the unemployment rate has gone up for three straight months. What, if any, plans do you have to deal with this problem, should it continue to rise?

THE PRESIDENT: Our answer is to increase the number of people working, and as I indicated a moment ago, we have added 500,000 more people working in the last 60 days. In addition, we have 88 million people working today, an all-time high. We are going to continue to emphasize that more people are working and more jobs are available. I am convinced that with our successful efforts against inflation and more jobs, the American people will subscribe to that economic policy.

QUESTION: May I follow up, Mr. President? Do you think the fact that unemployment is high in this particular period, just before the election, may harm you politically?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the American people are more knowledgeable, more sophisticated -- they know that employment is going up every month and that as long as there are people being hired and as long as the layoff rate continues to go down, the American people will be supportive of the economic policy of the Ford Administration.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this afternoon 40 Congressmen from 14 States and the District of Columbia are meeting. This is the newly formed, as you know, Northeast Coalition. What can you say to them were you to send a message to them? They are concerned about industry leaving the Northeast. They are concerned about -- I heard what you said to Aldo -- but they are concerned about joblessness, not people with jobs. They are concerned about urban plight. What do you say to that?

THE PRESIDENT: We have a good program to try and rehabilitate our major urban cities all throughout the United States, including the Northeast -- our revenue sharing program, our community development program.

I signed, after a great deal of work with the Congress, a mass transit bill that is very helpful and beneficial to major industrial centers throughout the United States. We will be glad to work with any group geographically or otherwise, including the Northeast group, to try and help in that regard.

QUESTION: They also say, Mr. President, they are not getting a fair share of the Federal dollars. You mentioned mass transportation. They say they are getting 15 percent of the dollars whereas there was 40 percent for mass transportation in the Northeast.

THE PRESIDENT: I am not familiar with those particular statistics but those funds are released based on laws passed by the Congress. So, if there is a problem in that regard, I think the basic law has to be amended.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you evaluate the debates as a factor in the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: The American people will be the winner and I am anxious that they get started as quickly as possible, and, as I indicated earlier, I proposed the first one be held today.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a related economic question. The steel companies have rescinded a price increase on flat rolled steel which is a principal component of automobiles. Would you like to see this followed by a similar reduction or rescission of the increases in automobile prices recently announced by the automobile companies?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope the automobile manufacturers would take that into consideration.

QUESTION: I would like to ask it in the framework of the fact that although you are claiming success against inflation, the industrial component of both wholesale and retail prices continues to rise, and this is the component that once it is up it does not go down. It is not volatile like food prices. With respect to the automobile companies, the other basic manufacturing segment of the economy, what would you like to see done? What do you think ought to be done? Or do you think anything needs to be done to try to stabilize the industrial component?

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THE PRESIDENT: I believe that the wholesome competition in the American free enterprise system will solve that problem better than any other way.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what sort of preparations are you making for these debates? Do you, for instance, have one of your aides acting out the role of your opponent so you can get ready that way?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all, Fred. I am obviously doing a great deal of study and preparation for these debates because I want the American people to know not only my own views but the views of Mr. Carter, and I think the best way for that to take place is for me and for himself to set forth those views, and that will be done in three debates.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what is it you are doing in preparation? Are you studying some of Mr. Carter's statements? Are you watching videotapes of Governor Carter?

THE PRESIDENT: The matter is being thoroughly studied by me comprehensively.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you mentioned the African guaranteeing of minority rights. How many black governments in Africa do you regard as having shown minority rights or respected them? Could you name some, and how could you go about guaranteeing such minority rights in the future?

THE PRESIDENT: I think in the plans that will evolve -- and I hope they do -- there will be adequate protection for minority rights in the two areas being considered at the present time.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what went into your judgment not to fire or reprimand the FBI Director in light of the questionable allegations raised against him?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer the Kelley matter this way: I was disappointed, to say the least, with the two responses given to the Kelley questions to Governor Carter. One, I think it showed a lack of compassion in the one statement, and a second statement that seemed to be contradictory of the first one.

I hope that Governor Carter understood that Mrs. Kelley at that time was suffering terminal cancer and that was a very sad and difficult time for the Director of the FBI. Number two, I was confused when in either Connecticut or Brooklyn he said that if he were President yesterday he would fire him, and then at the next stop he would not indicate whether he was going to fire him or keep him if he became President on January 21. So, I am confused on the one hand by his flip-flop on this issue, and I am very disappointed at his lack of compassion on the other.

Now the recommendation made to me by the Attorney General after thoroughly investigating the facts was that the circumstances were such that the FBI Director should be kept. He has reimbursed the Federal Government of \$35 (\$335), I think, for the furnishings for his apartment, and he has done a good job in my opinion in straightening out a very difficult situation in the FBI.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, on the matter of abortion, sir, do you feel that this issue, which is so semi-religious and so emotional, is a fit subject for a political debate, political discussion?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think the American people expect candidates for office to duck any issues just because they are intense, with good people on both sides having different views. I think the American people ought to get an answer from Governor Carter and myself on this issue just like on any other issue.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what do you think of Mr. Carter's characterization of you as "timid" in one statement and as "a captain hiding in a state room" in another?

THE PRESIDENT: That brings up an interesting point. I understand that yesterday Senator Mondale was complaining because I was not campaigning enough, and on August 4 of 1976 Governor Carter was complaining because I was campaigning too much. I wish they would get their act together. And it just seems to me that the American people want me first to be President and do the job here in the best way possible, and I intend to do it and I will campaign at the proper time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in connection with that, if you find your campaign running in a dry gulch, won't you change your plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't expect the campaign on behalf of President Ford to run into a dry gulch. We are making good headway. I think the polls reflect it, and we expect to win.

QUESTION: Mr. President, sir, the reports of your campaign committee during the primaries indicate that approximately 100 Federal officials gave campaign contributions to the President Ford Committee, and some of them subsequently said they did so in response to solicitation letters from Mr. Mosbacher and other officials of the committee. Do you think it is proper for the President Ford Committee to keep those contributions, or should they be sent back?

THE PRESIDENT: I was not familiar with any solicitation of any Federal official on behalf of the President Ford Committee, and when I was shown that some individuals of this Administration had voluntarily given to the President Ford Committee I did not know that they had done so beforehand. So I am sure there was no pressure, certainly none from me.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, today, I believe, is the second anniversary of the pardon of Richard Nixon. I know you said in the past, under the same circumstances you would issue the pardon again. I wonder if you have any thoughts you would share with us about the impact the pardon will have on the election and how you plan to respond to any charges that are made?

THE PRESIDENT: If it is made a political issue, either subtly or directly, it is going to be very difficult to anticipate what the public reaction will be, but I made that judgment two years ago today on the basis of the circumstances at that time.

I thought it was in the national interest that I concentrate on the international problems which were serious and domestic problems which were critical. I felt at that time I should devote 100 percent of my time to the problems both at home and abroad. I think if the same circumstances prevailed today, I would do the same.

QUESTION: Mr. President, this question is in two parts. Has the Soviet Union contacted you personally or this Government with regard to the pilot who has defected and asked for political asylum, and, secondly, are you concerned that your decision to grant political asylum will injure progress in our relations with the Soviet Union specifically on SALT and matters of that kind?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not familiar with any inquiries by the Soviet Union. They may have but I am just not informed as to that.

Number two, we have decided to grant asylum if the Soviet pilot asks for it. This is a tradition in the United States and as long as he wants such asylum, he will be granted it in the United States.

I don't think that granting him asylum will interfere with our relations with the Soviet Union.

QUESTION: Mr. President, going back to the Kelley matter for a moment. Governor Carter said yesterday also that the FBI Director should be as pure as Caesar's wife. Do you agree with that statement, and in light of the allegations against Mr. Kelley, do you think he is?

THE PRESIDENT: On the basis of a thorough investigation by the Attorney General, an outstanding lawyer, and I think an outstanding Attorney General, he recommended that I take the action which I did which was to keep the FBI Director.

I have full faith in the analysis and the recommendations of the Attorney General, and therefore I think I made the right decision.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.