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THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

TOM BROKAW
AND CASSIE MACKIN
ON THE TODAY SHOW

THE OVAL OFFICE

8:10 A.M. EDT

MR. BROKAW: Two weeks ago here on the Today program we had Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Presidential candidate, in a live interview from his hometown of Plains, Georgia. This morning we will have President Ford live from the White House.

Mr. Ford, good morning, first of all, and thank you for joining us. Also, tomorrow night I know you begin your campaign by taking it on the road for the first time since Labor Day at the University of Michigan, which is your alma mater.

Briefly, can you describe for us what will be the main theme of your speech tomorrow night?

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, Tom. I am looking forward to going to Ann Arbor tomorrow. I have not been back there a lot, but I have some great memories of that fine campus.

The thrust of the speech in Ann Arbor will be, first, to point out that in the last two years we faced some tough problems. We restored trust in the White House. We have turned the economy around; we are going in the right direction. And finally, we have achieved peace and we have the capability and the will to maintain it.

But, now that we have consolidated the situation here at home and abroad, it is my intention to point out the vision and the road that we will take in the next four years under a Ford Administration.

We will talk about the domestic problems -- jobs, home ownership, better health, better crime control, more recreation, better education -- and then we will point out some of the things that we are doing and must do in the area of foreign policy.

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MR. BROKAW: That is a pretty full menu, Mr. President. Will there be new, specific proposals from the Ford Administration unveiled tomorrow night?

THE PRESIDENT: I think there will be some surprises, but I hesitate to preempt it, Tom, this morning. We want a little interest coming tomorrow in Ann Arbor.

MR. BROKAW: You don't want to hesitate too much. We would be glad to have you share it here on the Today Show.

THE PRESIDENT: We will try it. You better make sure that you have your people out there.

MR. BROKAW: I think there is a fair chance we will be covered there, probably.

Mr. President, there has been, as you know, some criticism of your campaign schedule so far. What happens after Ann Arbor? Do you come back to the White House and be very Presidential again, appearing in the Rose Garden signing bills and appearing in the various forms that reminds everyone that you are the Chief Executive?

THE PRESIDENT: Tom, I feel I have a very important obligation in Washington, primarily as long as Congress is in session. We have to balance the activity or lack of activity in the Congress with the responsibility of being President.

Somebody has to be in the Nation's Capitol to make sure that the Congress does not go off on the deep end and, of course, the American people expect their President, while he is in office, to primarily carry out Presidential responsibilities.

When we do have an opportunity, following the time when Congress adjourns, we certainly will be campaigning. But, right now, with Congress in session, it is vitally important that somebody be here to have a check on their activities.

MR. BROKAW: But, Mr. President, I dare say I recall any number of times when I was a White House correspondent covering you and you were traveling around the country a good bit in 1974 and again last year. You were telling us you did not want to be a hostage to the White House even when people were taking shots at you in San Francisco, that you felt it was very important that the President get out and meet with the people, go to the local areas and discuss the local problems.

So, isn't this a shift in your attitude? Doesn't it represent really a campaign strategy?

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THE PRESIDENT: Not necessarily, Tom. The trips that I made in 1974 were primarily on weekends and, secondly, they were nonpolitical events when they were held during the week. You are correct that I went to 11 White House conferences around the country where we took questions from the audience, where we answered questions that were asked from all segments of our society, but the primary responsibility then was to do it in a nonpolitical way and to carry out those responsibilities in an information-gathering process rather than a campaigning technique.

But, once the Congress leaves town, I think you will see an increased activity by me because I will have more time to do so and the Presidential responsibilities in this office will be less than they are at the present time.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, I want to ask you about some issues that are in the news this morning.

There is a good chance, it now appears, that there will be a strike at the Ford Motor Company. Do you anticipate that it will be necessary for the Government to get involved in a mediation effort because, after all, as you well know, this could be critical to economic recovery in this country.

THE PRESIDENT: Until midnight tonight, Tom, the labor-management representatives will be still negotiating the Ford-UAW differences. I think, therefore, it would be premature for me--at least until the end of the strike deadline--for me to make any comment one way or another.

I do hope through the normal processes of labor-management negotiations that labor on the one hand and management on the other will settle them because a strike at the Ford Motor Company could have and would have some unfavorable aspects as far as our economy is concerned.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, Cassie Mackin has a question.

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, Cassie.

MISS MACKIN: Good morning, Mr. President. I was wondering whether you plan any foreign travel at all before the election?

THE PRESIDENT: We don't foresee any at the present time, Cassie, no.

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MR. BROKAW: I wonder if it will be necessary -- Secretary Kissinger is now en route, of course, to a sensitive mission in Africa, trying to arrange negotiations in South Africa. Specifically, what do you see the next step for the United States there? Will we have to support clandestine activity if Rhodesia continues to resist black nationalist activity and the rise of black nationalism in Rhodesia?

THE PRESIDENT: Tom, there are two problems that we are trying to work on in cooperation with the several parties that are involved; one, Namibia and, two, Rhodesia. We are more optimistic that we can work with the others in getting some progress in the case of Namibia. It is a tough problem, but the prospects for success in that area are better than in the case of Rhodesia.

Now, in either case, the odds are really against us, but we feel that it is of maximum importance, not only from the point of view of ourselves, but certainly from the point of view of Southern Africa, and certainly from the point of view of the world as a whole, that somebody take the lead, and the United States is doing so with Secretary Kissinger's trip there.

It is so tenuous at the present time and the difficulties are so great that it would be unwise for me to be specific in just what the outcome might be. But, despite these odds, I decided that it was in the best interest of all concerned that Secretary Kissinger go on this trip, and I inwardly feel that because we have done the right thing, it will turn out okay.

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MISS MACKIN: Mr. President, have there been any more conversations with Ronald Reagan? Do you expect him to be out campaigning for you?

THE PRESIDENT: I have talked to Governor Reagan, as I recall, three times. I have people on my staff that are talking to comparable people on his staff. We are well along and in total accord on what he will be doing not only for my candidacy but for the Republican Party. He was down in Mexico for several days' vacation over the past weekend but now that he is back, it is my impression, my belief, that he will be campaigning hard for the ticket as well as for the party.

MISS MACKIN: On the subject of Congress and your staying in the White House, can one conclude from what you said that if Congress would wrap up its business this week then you would get out on the campaign trail immediately?

THE PRESIDENT: The odds would be far greater, but as you know, Cassie, the Congress has said it is not going to adjourn at least until October 2nd and from my 25-plus years in the Congress, when they set a tentative deadline, they usually go beyond that, so it would be my expectation that Congress will adjourn some time in the week following October 2nd and certainly, by that time, I feel that it will be possible for me to take broader opportunities around the country. But until Congress adjourns, I think the President has a pretty important responsibility to stay here and keep his eye on them.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, I know that you have often said that the only poll that counts is the one on election day, but at the same time, I know you also read the polls and you no doubt saw the recent survey that indicated that fully half, perhaps the majority of the voting-age people in this country may not go to the voting booth at all in November. Isn't that a commentary of sorts on your leadership? After all, you have been in office now for two years and wouldn't one expect you would be able to arouse the voting public more than that.

THE PRESIDENT: Tom, I am disappointed that the polls do indicate that somewhere between 65 and 70 percent(million) of the people who are eligible to vote won't participate. It is hard to understand because there is a political difference between Governor Carter on the one hand and myself on the other, I believe, in certain things. He has committed himself to a different philosophy. This ought to be a very important election. It is. I hope that between now and November 2nd in the next 50-some days, we will be able, through the debates, through the differences that will be developed, that we will generate an interest on the part of the American people in this critical election which means whether Mr. Carter on the one hand, or myself on the other, will be leading this country in the first four years of our third century.

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I am going to delineate the differences between Mr. Carter and myself-- they are substantial, both at home and abroad--and thereby increase the political activity on behalf of all Americans.

MISS MACKIN: Mr. President, unemployment continues to be disturbingly high and I would think higher than you had hoped it would be as you go into this election. Isn't this something of an embarrassment to you?

THE PRESIDENT: Cassie, I think you have to put that in proper perspective. Yes, the unemployment statistic is too high, but bear in mind that we have 88 million people working today which is an all-time high in the history of the United States. We have added 4 million people to the payrolls in this country in the last 15 months and we have added a half a million more people gainfully employed in the last two months. So, although the unemployment statistic is too high -- and we are going to get it down -- I take some pride in the fact that we have added this many new jobs in the last year or so.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, we always measure the rate of unemployment by the percentage of those out of work, not by the number of those working, so it remains at nearly eight percent. Do you foresee any Government action that you will have to take between now and the end of the year to get it down below seven percent?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't foresee any dramatic action. We have had a sound economic course which had a very substantial impact on the rate of inflation and by keeping the rate of inflation going down, we have added jobs, added people on payrolls, so if we can keep the pressure on inflation and keep inflation going down, I think we will continue to create the atmosphere that means employment will be going up and unemployment going down.

MR. BROKAW: Very briefly, Mr. President, would you veto that \$3-1/2 billion public works bill if it comes back to your desk?

THE PRESIDENT: I have not seen the final figures on it, so I think it is premature to make any comment, Tom.

MR. BROKAW: Mr. President, thank you very much for joining us here on Today this morning. We will look forward to covering your campaign in the coming weeks.

THE PRESIDENT: I have enjoyed it, Tom. Thank you very much.

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(AT 8:24 A.M. EDT)