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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT
AND
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
CHARLES PICKERING
GOP CHAIRMAN FROM THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
PAULA UNRUH
GOP CHAIRMAN FROM THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA
AND
HARRY DENT
THE PRESIDENT FORD COMMITTEE
ADVISOR FOR SOUTHERN POLITICS

THE BRIEFING ROOM

4:29 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I have some very outstanding leaders of the Republican Party from a very important area of the country. As you will recall when I was in Vail I said we were going to have a national campaign. Some of you doubted it. I want to repeat it, and I will give you some evidence of what we are going to do to show the good faith of that comment.

On Saturday, September 25, we are going to fly from here to Louisiana and we will board a Mississippi riverboat, the NATCHEZ, and we will go on a riverboat trip from that point in Louisiana down to New Orleans, spend the night in New Orleans and on Sunday, the 26th, we will drive from New Orleans through Mississippi, through Alabama, and we will get to Florida Sunday night, the 26th. We will stay overnight in Florida that night and on the following Monday morning I will speak to the National Association of Police Chiefs in Miama Beach.

I think this is the best evidence that what I said, I meant; that we would have a national campaign. We were going to seek full support from the States in the South and here, alongside of me, are the Republican State Chairmen from those Southern States.

We have with us Paula Unruh, the State Chairman of the State of Oklahoma. But, before I leave -- and Paula and the others will answer questions -- let me just say we will see you on the boat.

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Q Did they give you an optimistic reading about the South?

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely. I will let them answer, Helen.

Q Mr. President, before you go, could you react to Governor Carter's comments today?

THE PRESIDENT: I will see you later, Phil.

MR. NESSEN: We do have the announcement reduced to paper, the details of the trip as far as they are known now. We will hand them out as soon as the briefing is over.

Go ahead, Paula.

MRS. UNRUH: I just wanted to have a chance to tell the President that the reason the Southern State Chairmen are up here today -- and we have all talked about it -- that is, to let him know and to let the people in the United States know that the solid South is not so solidly for Jimmy Carter. We feel that the day of regional support is over in American politics.

The fact that Jimmy Carter may be the boy next door to a lot of people in the South does not necessarily anymore have a lot to do with it. Southerners are looking at what is best for their country, and they are thinking about their families and they are thinking about the life they are going to have in this country.

We think they are going to be looking at what President Ford stands for and they are going to vote accordingly in November. We are here to predict that President Ford is going to carry a great deal of the South on November 2, and personally we all are going to be in there trying to bring that about.

Q How many States do you think the President will get in the election of the South?

MRS. UNRUH: Out of the 13 in the particular region?

Q Yes.

MRS. UNRUH: I would like to predict at least half.

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Q Are you prepared to name the ones you think he will lose?

MRS. UNRUH: No, I am not prepared to name them. We have seven weeks to go in the campaign. I think a lot can happen between now and then. The ones I would say today might be different tomorrow. I will speak for my own, Oklahoma. I think President Ford can carry Oklahoma.

Q Mrs. Unruh, did the President pledge to return to the South sometime during the election campaign beyond this trip that he announced today?

MRS. UNRUH: He certainly said it was a possibility.

Q Do you have some evidence in the form of polls perhaps to support your Oklahoma contention?

MRS. UNRUH: Yes, I do have. We started some telephoning this past week on a voter identification program. It got underway in Tulsa, and the results of those calls were rather startling to us because we have been considering it a very nip and tuck thing and, of course, it could end up being that way because the calls were made in an area of the State which is strongly Republican.

But, they were not our better precincts. We were getting as much as two to one and better results. We were a little leery that that was too good to be true so we checked through some of the other candidates' campaigns that were going on and they were getting a two to one support also for the President in Tulsa, in Oklahoma, which has just thrilled us.

Q Could you name for us three or four precincts?

MRS. UNRUH: Do you mean by number?

Q Yes.

MRS. UNRUH: No, I am sorry, I can't. I was not involved directly in the calling. I got this as a report from the people who did it.

Q So that we might believe it, could you obtain it for us and get it to us?

MRS. UNRUH: Yes, of course.

Q Would you transmit it to the United States Press, Washington Office?

MRS. UNRUH: Yes, I would be glad to.

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Q Where do you think Jimmy Carter is the most vulnerable among the Southern voters? In what area, on what issue?

MRS. UNRUH: You know, I think probably the thing that they are going to catch on to him about is the fact that he says, on the one hand, he wants to put in all these programs which he calls to help people. And they are just more Government spending programs to tax the American voter. He, on the other hand, turns around and says how he is going to balance the budget. I gave an example at noon today where a woman, if she decides she wants to jump off the deep end and go out and buy \$1,000 worth of clothes and she has \$200 or \$300 in the bank and goes to her husband and says she will balance that bank statement at the end of the month, he is smart enough to know she can't do that.

I think the American people are intelligent enough to know Jimmy Carter can't promise them he is going to go out and spend all this money on all these programs and yet have a balanced budget. He is being caught up in his own words.

Q Mrs. Unruh, I understand this morning you said something about Texas in regard to the President's chances of improving in Texas at the present time.

MRS. UNRUH: I believe the question was how was he going to do in Texas. The polls in Texas, I understand -- and there, again, I guess it depends on the polls you are talking about -- make Texas look like a tough State for the Republican Party or for the Ford-Dole ticket, but we do know former Governor John Connally is heading up the Ford campaign there. We have a great deal of faith in John Connally.

Q Do you expect to be getting a lot of Republicans to be working for the President or do you think there will be problems with the Reagan supporters just falling by the wayside?

MRS. UNRUH: That is the beautiful part, there are no problems. I predicted a long time ago that when this contest was over, we were not going to have a problem and I will tell you why. We did not have a contest between two candidates where the supporters on one side supported that individual because they were against the other one.

It was not that way on either side, and now that the National Convention is over, it only took a few days and everybody has really hung in. I think Charles Pickering, from Mississippi, is the State chairman there. He was a Reagan supporter. Charles, it might be fun if you answered that.

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MR. PICKERING: We have had no serious problems in Mississippi. All of the Reagan leadership that fought so hard for Governor Reagan in our delegation are openly supporting President Ford: Billy Mounger, Victor Mavar, Swan Yerger, all of these have openly endorsed President Ford. We are just tickled to death with the progress. We started down -- some polls said as much as 40 percent. The most recent polls showed we have come up within three or four percent of Jimmy Carter. Jimmy Carter is vulnerable on his platform on the issues of whether or not he is consistent in the stance that he takes this week and next week. We think the people of Mississippi will vote for President Ford in November.

Q Could you be a little bit more specific about what States you think the President's chances look best in? We understand the polls, for instance in Mississippi were not as bad as some people might have thought.

MR. PICKERING: I think the President is in excellent shape in Louisiana. I think he is in excellent shape in Mississippi. I think he is in excellent shape in Virginia. I think he is running very close in some others. I think he will get a majority of electoral votes from the Southern States.

Q How about Mr. Dent's evaluation of the situation in the South? Would you like to play the numbers game with us?

MR. DENT: I would add a few more States onto what Charlie has said. The point is that the cotton South is blooming. That is the point. All this talk about writing off the cotton South, and the cotton South is as fertile today as any other part of the country in electoral votes for the President. You can mention Texas, you can mention Louisiana, you can mention Alabama, surely Florida, South Carolina, in my State, the Darden Poll showed the President was running a little bit ahead in South Carolina.

Then, you come up to Virginia and then Tennessee and North Carolina are coming on. We don't rule out the Georgia situation with Lester in there running.

So, the point is -- you ask why is this happening? Why is Jimmy Carter going down like the Darden Poll says and the President is coming up? The reason is because the people in the South realize that instead of being a conservative, that the man is really a liberal, a born again liberal. When you look at the Carter record of his flip-flops back and fourth -- he is down in the South visiting George Wallace saying one thing. He is up in Michigan praising Senator McGovern, saying another thing.

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But we know down South that we no longer can trust this man who ran as a conservative in the primaries and gave in to the Democratic liberal establishment at the Convention with the platform naming his running mate, and in the statements and the stands he has taken since the Convention.

He can't come back down South and try to pick it up because the people in the South no longer trust Jimmy Carter and they do today come to trust the President of the United States because they know who he is, where he is, what he has done and where he is going to lead the country.

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Q Mr. Dent, since the President wouldn't stick around and answer any questions here, I wonder if I could put to you the question for some reaction on what Carter said today and that was that he now understands why it took Mr. Ford so long to get out of the White House, because he does not have a record to run on.

MR. DENT: He has the record and that was the key reason why, frankly, I supported him prior to the Convention and at the Convention, because when any guy comes along and he has a record of peace, prosperity and public trust, I don't see how you can beat it in the general election.

So, it is not only the fact that Carter is going down because he is losing public trust, but it is the fact that the President is coming up because he does have the record on the issues that count. Lou Harris says that when you look at the polls. The issues are on the President's side, but the biggest issue of all, I believe, is going to come out in the TV debates and all the campaign appearances from here on forward is going to be the question of which man can you trust and believe in.

Q Mr. Dent, I want to ask you, sir, do you remember the fact the President promised not to pardon Richard Nixon? He promised to cut taxes and in other matters did reverse himself on positions of major policy? Do you regard those as having been flip-flops or something else and, if so, what?

MR. DENT: The President has made some changes but Jimmy Carter ran. The President, when you look at him in this campaign, he has been consistent in the campaign, all the way through, what he has told the people he is going to do in the next term as President.

Jimmy Carter started out as this conservative and, as I say, he went to the Convention and changed and the tide in the country -- all the polls show this is a conservative ripple running across the country -- and that is where Jimmy Carter is caught. He is caught off base and he is trying to make the attempt to get back on base, but in the South it is too late because down South, you know, you either win the public trust or you don't, and you can't come back and pick it up.

Q Why do you think Jimmy Carter changed at the Convention? If the country is conservative, why didn't he stay conservative?

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MR. DENT: I think he was trying to unite that loose, fragmented Democratic coalition and in doing that he has gone against the grain of the prevailing mood in the United States.

Q Mr. Dent, how decisive will the debates be in the South in deciding between Ford and Carter?

MR. DENT: They will be very decisive because the people there will be able to see clearly the Conservative platform of Jerry Ford and his party as against the liberal platform and stance of Jimmy Carter and his party. When they see that, that does it. Down South, you know, we have always been a little leery of people coming in from outside and trying to tell us what to do and run our affairs. But, we worry even more about the Lyndon Johnsons who come from down home and then change and come back and tell us a different tune.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 4:43 P.M. EDT)