

September 25, 1976

I am pleased to announce a
 PRESS CONFERENCE
 OF
 JOHN BELL WILLIAMS
 FORMER GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
 ROBERT KENNON
 FORMER GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA
 MARVIN GRIFFIN
 FORMER GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA
 STEVE NIMMER
 FORMER STATE REPRESENTATIVE
 FROM THE STATE OF GEORGIA
 VIRGINIA SUGGS
 CO-CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL WOMEN FOR WALLACE
 MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
 PRENTISS WALKER
 FORMER REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
 JOHN W. BOWDEN
 NORTHEAST FLORIDA BUILDING CONSTRUCTION TRADE COUNCIL
 JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA
 ABOARD THE SS NATCHEZ

12:25 P.M. CDT

MR. NESSEN: Some of you have asked to talk to the political leaders on the boat and some of these gentlemen have just come down from talking to the President and telling the President of their support. Let me announce their names and then they can just come up here and you can ask them your questions.

These are all, incidentally, well-known Democrats and many of them holders of high office.

We have, first of all, former Congressman and former Governor of Mississippi, John Bell Williams; the former Governor of Louisiana, Robert Kennon; the former Governor of Georgia, Marvin Griffin; we have former Georgia State Representative Steve Nimmer; and we have Mrs. Virginia Suggs of Montgomery, Alabama, who was appointed in 1972 by Governor Wallace as Co-Chairman of the National Women for Wallace organization. I am sorry, but I forgot Congressman William Colmer of Mississippi. He is former Congressman William Colmer of Mississippi, who at one time was Chairman of the House Rules Committee.

I don't know if anybody has any statement to make or whether they will simply answer your questions.

MR. WILLIAMS: I am John Bell Williams, and I am not running for anything.

Q. Why are you supporting President Ford, Mr. Williams?

MORE

MR. WILLIAMS: There are reasons why I support Mr. Ford. Of course, I know Mr. Ford both as a personal and philosophical friend and have for many, many years as a colleague in the Congress, but more than that I don't think it will come as any surprise to anyone who knows my background of independence.

I support Mr. Ford and Mr. Dole because I believe that they are the two best candidates running on the best platform that is available to the people of America. For some 40 years the Federal Government has been engaged in expansion, more and more expansion over the years.

I think what we need now is containment of the powers of the Federal Government, not more expansion, and I believe that President Ford and the platform of the Republican Party tend to go in that direction than the Democratic Party and its candidates.

Q Are you still a Democrat?

MR. WILLIAMS: I really don't know what I am at this point. I have been a Democrat all my life, of course, but the Democratic Party seems to have left me long ago.

Q When was the last time you endorsed --

MR. WILLIAMS: You have some others up here, that you might want to ask questions. I beg your pardon.

Q When was the last time you supported a Democrat for President?

MR. WILLIAMS: 1952, and I was not too proud of that, as things turned out. I take it back. I supported George Wallace, a good Democrat.

MR. GRIFFIN: I am Marvin Griffin, Democratic former Governor of Georgia.

Q Why are you supporting President Ford?

MR. GRIFFIN: I am supporting President Ford because I am conservative in principles, conservative in conduct and I believe the Ford-Dole ticket will be the best for the United States.

Q How do you think Georgia will go?

MR. GRIFFIN: Of course, we have another former Governor and incidentally I was Governor a number of years before the present candidate for the Presidency on the Democratic ticket. Mr. Carter is a Georgian, but I want to say here and now that there are many, many other Georgians besides myself who do not espouse his kind of political philosophy.

MORE

Q Does that mean Georgia will be for Ford?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I would like to tell it like I think it is. It will be a hard job, I think, Mr. Carter being a native Georgian. I won't say that he won't carry Georgia. I say we are going to do our dead level best to keep him from carrying it.

Q What kind of Governor was Mr. Carter?

MR. GRIFFIN: I think President Ford -- and that is one reason I am aboard the NATCHEZ Nine today -- has his record and now I can afford to say this because I was an ardent supporter of Governor Carter in his race for Governor of Georgia in 1970. I endorsed him at a luncheon of the Atlanta Press News Media about two weeks before the primary, but his Reorganization Act that he likes to talk about so much I merely call to your attention and give a repetition of President Ford's figures that he used the other night on the debates, and that is this:

When Mr. Carter came into the Governor's Office of Georgia, the budget of our State was \$1 billion 50 million. Four years later, when he went out of office, the budget was \$1 billion 700 million. When Mr. Carter became Governor in January 1971, there were 48,000 State employees on the payroll. When he went out of office four years later, there were 60 million -- 60,000, and let me be sure we have got that corrected -- not 60 million, 60,000 -- State employees or an increase of 12,000 over four years.

The present Governor, who is doing his best -- and I think doing an outstanding job -- he is a supporter and has been of Governor Carter. He said that he inherited a welfare mess and a Medicaid mess that was a shambles.

Well, I am not one to doubt the present Governor of Georgia, but I say if we get a reorganization of the Federal Government alone, along the lines that this gentleman says he reorganized the Government of Georgia, then the country is in a devil of a fix, in my opinion.

Any other questions.

MORE

FROM

Q Yes. Governor, didn't the present Governor of Georgia say that he was complaining about Federal handling and not about Governor Carter's handling of State Medicaid?

MR. GRIFFIN: That is what he said. That is what he said by way of explanation. That is not what he said in the premise.

Q Are you running for anything now?

MR. GRIFFIN: No. I am 69 years old, or was the 4th of this month, and I am not running for anything, and I am not doing any more than I can get out of doing. (Laughter)

Q Governor, can you compare Governor Carter with one joree bird?

MR. GRIFFIN: No. It is like the little fellow whose name was John Hancock and they were taking the school roll, and the teacher was a little facetious. She said, "Are you the John Hancock that signed the Declaration of Independence?" He said, "No, ma'am, I was not, but if I have been there, I damn sure would have." And I would have made him a joree at the time if we had had some similar periods.

Q Governor, what political effect has Carter's comments in the Playboy Magazine article had on his chances in the South?

MR. GRIFFIN: I don't know too much about that. You know, I think that what he said is fairly natural, it is human, but then, I very seriously doubt his saying so. It is all right to tell what you want to tell. Tell it all to the American people but I don't believe I would have told that. (Laughter)

Q Has it hurt Governor Carter in the south?

MR. GRIFFIN: What is that?

Q Have his comments hurt his political chances in the south?

MR. GRIFFIN: Let me say I -- and I hope this is wishful thinking -- I hope it didn't help him any.

Q There are some people here who don't know what a joree bird is. Do you want to tell them what it is?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, a joree bird, if you live close to the soil, is one of those beautiful little birds that will take two steps forward, but if you make a move at him or say something to him, he will jump back three steps. That is a joree bird.

MORE

Q Does it remind you of anyone you know?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I don't know any joeses right now, not worth mentioning.

Q Thank you.

MR. KENNON: My name is Bob Kennon. I am a native of Louisiana and had the privilege of serving as Governor when Eisenhower had his first term as President.

Q Are you a Republican?

MR. KENNON: Well, if you are talking about national politics, the last Democrat I voted for for President was Franklin Roosevelt and he promised that the United States, when he got in, he was going to reduce Federal spending and it went up geometrically, whatever that means. (Laughter)

Q You don't think it would be necessary to increase with a depression and a war.

MR. KENNON: He went in in 1932. We didn't have a war for nine years.

Q We had a depression.

MR. KENNON: With the depression, he still spent more Federal money and that didn't help the depression. I would not have thought so, but he did what I think the Jeffersonian Democratic Party is not for. He increased the things that the Federal Government took part in. I commend him, of course, for having the forestry business and doing some things. He did the best he could to develop good things with the youth. Franklin Roosevelt did a lot of great things. President and Mrs. Roosevelt began almost a socialistic need to have homes for people to live in without worrying and he was the first one who said, we will maintain anybody who don't make a living; we will give them a living. I don't know whether you were old enough to remember that.

Q How is Ford going to do in Louisiana?

MR. KENNON: I will put it this way -- that Eisenhower carried Louisiana. When I introduced Eisenhower to 20,000 people in New Orleans when I was the Governor of the State of Louisiana, I said that it makes no difference by what name you call the man. The fact is I don't think General Eisenhower has had any training or any ingrained feeling toward any political party. I said, he is not a Republican, he is our neighbor. He was born in Texas and he was a reasonable-minded man and knew a lot about world affairs.

MORE

I was very proud to support General Eisenhower and we supported him in 1956, and we carried Louisiana for Eisenhower in 1956. Our voting machine was stuck with the Democratic Party. We missed it by a short time in 1952, although I am sure, on a nationwide basis, I think that Jeffersonian democracy means that we don't want too much government.

I believe that the Democratic Party, as usual, has had more government and more things to take hold of and the Democratic platform is very much in favor of taking over private enterprise, and Louisiana is not for that. Louisiana is for businesses to be operated on their own with a minimum of regulation and handcuffing and breaking into their business. So, I believe that the people of the south want President Ford's philosophy rather than that of Governor Carter. Governor Carter is in a situation where he, of course, is bound to the Democratic platform, whose vestiges include the divestiture of the oil companies, that a man that explores for oil cannot manufacture nor sell it.

On the other hand, if the man can't do anything with the oil, he is not going to spend millions or billions to find it and they are not going to refine it if they don't know whether they can sell it or not.

We have a real estate property tax that you cannot believe. I would daresay that the millions -- what it cost you for \$1,000 value to pay your taxes on in Louisiana on homes or farms or businesses, is less than one-half of what it is in Mississippi or Alabama or Georgia or Texas. It is negligible and I will say this -- that a big percentage, and I know the Louisiana budget -- someone during my term -- that a great deal of our money that goes into the support of the school system of Louisiana comes from our service tax on oil. Oil means a lot to the State of Louisiana.

MR. NESSEN: Why don't we hear from Mrs. Suggs, now, so they can move along and make sure everybody gets heard from.

MR. KENNON: I might say this, that the Democratic platform takes away from the State the right to pass a right to work law and most of the Southern States and most of the States of the nation have that. We want to keep it. The Democratic platform takes away from the citizen the right to bear arms and that is very critical, not only for duck hunting but just in general. It hurts the sportsmanship and we are sports-like people in Louisiana.

So, my prediction is based on experience and what I hear in Louisiana, that President Ford would carry Louisiana by a substantial majority.

MR. NESSEN: Thank you, Governor.

Mrs. Suggs.

MORE

MRS. SUGGS: Ladies and gentlemen of the press. My name is Virginia Suggs. I am from Montgomery, Alabama. I was appointed by Governor George Wallace in 1972 as the National Coordinator for Women for Wallace. I want you to know that I think that President Ford has done a terrific job in the couple of years that he has been in office.

I think he deserves to be in the office for the next four years. I am completely and utterly for him, and not only am I, as an Alabamian and a Wallace supporter for President Ford, but I know that there are a lot of other Wallace supporters throughout the nation that are for President Ford.

I will be visiting with these people over the next month and I hope to touch Wisconsin, Florida Massachusetts -- wherever I might be needed because we need President Ford for the next four years.

Thank you.

MR. NESSEN: Congressman?

MR. COLMER: My name is Bill Colmer. I am from South Mississippi. I spent 14 years in the House of Representatives and retired four years ago. During that time, I got to know the President quite well. In fact, I was a senior Member of the House when he came in.

I am a Democrat. I have supported every Democratic candidate for President up until I retired. My relationship with President Ford grew into a personal friendship. So, presently, I am for him. Philosophically, I am for him.

I am just one of many hundreds of Democrats -- I should have said thousands of Democrats -- in Mississippi who is going to cast his vote for President Ford.

MR. NESSEN: There was one person I didn't introduce as a former Congressman from Mississippi, Prentiss Walker, who joined us a little late.

Prentiss?

MR. WALKER: I am Prentiss Walker. I was a former Member of Congress from Mississippi. I may be a little bit prejudiced, but President Ford is a personal friend of mine, and so is Senator Dole. As far as I am personally concerned, there is just no comparison between the two platforms. The Republican platform is one that I think all of us in the south can live with, and the Democratic platform is one that I think that no one in the nation can live with.

Thank you.

MORE

MR. NIMMER: I am Steve Nimmer, from South Georgia. I am a small businessman and I am for President Ford because he more nearly expresses my views as to how the Government should operate and what it should do for the citizens of this country.

Thank you.

Q Mr. Nimmer, where are you from? Where is your home, sir?

MR. NIMMER: My 10-20 is Blackshear, Georgia, a small town in the agricultural area. We are very rich in tobacco growing. We are about 65 miles north of Jacksonville, pretty close to the Florida border.

Q Sir, is there any particular policy difference why you decided to back Ford against Carter?

MR. NIMMER: I have known Governor Carter for quite a few years and I just feel that President Ford, with his experience as Vice President and Member of Congress, his tenure there and his service as President, would make him much more qualified to lead the country at this time.

Q Sir, were you elected as a Democrat to the Legislature?

MR. NIMMER: Yes, I was.

Q Are you still a Democrat?

MR. NIMMER: You know, that is a difficult question for a Democrat that is going to vote Republican, but you phrase it any way you like. I just would like to tell you where I am and how I am going to vote.

MR. NESSEN: If there are no other questions, I can give you a brief report on what the President has been doing. He met with some of the local political guests. There are so many on board that it was decided to divide them into two groups -- the guests who come from the States of Alabama through Louisiana first, and that meeting has been held. Then, from there to the end of the alphabet will be a little later in the trip.

I am indebted to Bill Greener for his notes here.

He thanked them for their warm welcome. He thanked them for joining us. He said, "You don't need a speech. This is a great occasion. It is the kind of campaigning I like to do."

MORE

Then, he was asked about the debate the other night, and he said, "I enjoyed the other night. I am looking forward to the next two debates. We are going to do better and better."

Then Clarke Reed sort of welcomed the President and said, "We are glad to see you in the Cotton South."

The rest of it was just mingling and social small talk.

At one point, the President told the group, "It is our distinct impression we are on a big upswing." Then, he mentioned he thought he was only two or three or four points behind in the polls now.

We hope, for the rest of the afternoon, to be able to bring other guests down here to talk to you and to report on their meetings with the President and to answer your questions about their role and their view of the campaign.

Q How about the President? Will he come down?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans to right now.

MORE

MR. NESSEN: Let me let you talk to one other person who is on the boat and who has met the President and will answer your questions about his role and his State in the campaign. He is John W. Bowden. He is from Jacksonville, Florida, and he is the President of the Northeast Florida Building Construction Trade Council. That is an AFL-CIO union.

I will let John tell you about his views and his part in the campaign in Florida.

John?

MR. BOWDEN: Let me just take a minute of your time and tell you the reason why I am supporting President Ford for election as President of the United States. In the early part of the year, I was a supporter of Henry Jackson -- I followed him throughout the country in New York, Pennsylvania, Florida -- and I also had an opportunity to view Mr. Carter as he traveled around the country making speeches and I never found that he was very consistent in his position on a lot of issues. He was on a different issue just by the way of the wind.

Now, I know that Mr. Meany has come out and endorsed an endorsement of Jimmy Carter for President of the United States, and I respect him for his position, but I don't believe that the total labor force in the United States is going to vote for Mr. Carter because I believe that the rank and file of organized labor is strongly interested in what happens to the country from a national defense posture. I know I am.

I like the position that President Ford took about the amnesty. I like the position he takes about a strong defense. There are many, many positions he takes.

Mr. Carter talks about one problem, about unemployment. Unemployment in this country rises and falls just like anything else, but I believe that you will find through the long course as the campaign draws closer to November that you will find the rank and file of many labor organizations will support Jerry Ford for President because, number one, they are more interested in what happens to the country, I think, than anything else, and that is the reason why I so vigorously support him. I believe he is the type of man that has the credibility to be President of the United States. Sometimes I wonder if Mr. Carter's credibility entitles him to have such an awesome job of being President.

MORE

I think President of the United States is probably the greatest job in the world, and probably the toughest job, and I think we need a tough man to fill a tough job, which will be in the interest of the whole country.

Thank you.

MR. NESSEN: Any questions for Mr. Bowden?

Q What about common situs picketing?

MR. BORDEN: Let me just tell you in my opinion about common situs picketing. I am fully aware of the extent that labor unions and people went to get the common situs picketing passed through the House and through the Senate, and I know that President Ford agreed to sign it, and I know he also vetoed it, but let me give you my position about that.

If a guy does 99 things for you and he can't do that 100th, I don't condemn him for it and I think organized labor can live without common situs picketing. We lived without it for 25 years and we made our point. I strongly believe if organized labor would sit down with President Ford with the intent of putting the country first and putting the welfare of the country first, I think that President Ford is the type of man that will listen to some of their problems and do what he can in the best interest of organized labor.

But, let me say to you as organized labor -- and I wish organized labor throughout the country would take the same position -- I am more interested in what happens in the United States of America than I am any other thing.

MR. NESSEN: Let me mention just by way of background on Mr. Bowden, I forgot to mention when I introduced him earlier in this campaign year he was a supporter and traveled with and worked with Senator Jackson in Senator Jackson's campaign.

Any questions for any of the panelists?

Q Will you describe the area where Ford is meeting with these groups?

MR. NESSEN: Right back there in the lounge, in the dining room.

Q On this level?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, this level.

We will do a little more of this later on on the trip. Thank you.

END (AT 12:55 P.M. CDT)