

September 26, 1976

PRESS POOL REPORT - AIR FORCE ONE - MOBILE/MIAMI

Enroute, Chief of Staff, Richard B. Cheney wandered back and was drawn into (though without much reluctance it should be noted) a discussion of the southern trip and George Wallace's appearance at a GOP rally. Cheney agreed with the obvious, saying he thought Wallace's appearance was indeed politically significant.

"It shows that Jimmy Carter has a problem in the south," he said, adding that the entire trip indicated that Ford has "a lot of support" in the south and that the Presidential race in the south will by-and-large be "a close two-party contest".

Back to Carter: Cheney said Carter's situation with the south could be somewhat compared to Reagan's problem with the south; that is, Reagan worried about the north and picked Schwelker and in so doing let Mississippi get away from him. Similarly, he said, Carter has been taking stands and saying things elsewhere that are beginning to hurt him in his home area.

"I really think Carter's got a fundamental problem in the south," he said. "He's not tracking with a majority of the people in the south."

For instance: "It's been a long time since a guy who advocates cutting the defense budget has carried the south." Cheney listed Carter's positions on gun control, 14B of Taft-Hartley as of Taft-Hartley as other problems for him in the south.

"A man of Carter's liberal philosophy has never carried the south," he repeated.

Cheney also said he thought the Playboy interview hurt Carter but the real impact couldn't be measured. "I don't think it helps him any,"

The bottom line to Cheney was that the President will be quite well in Carter territory. "I really believe we'll carry a number of deep south states," he predicted. The Ford camp has not done any polling in the south since just past Labor Day, but is polling at the moment. He named Mississippi, Louisiana, and Virginia as states where Ford was in "good shape" and added that polls had indicated that the border states "seem to be tougher (for us) than the deep south states." He specifically noted trouble in Tennessee.

Asked about the Ford's prospects elsewhere, he repeated earlier PFC estimates that Ford was doing well in Illinois and New York and that Pennsylvania and New Jersey "look good". He didn't precisely define that but our best judgment is that he was saying these are states where Ford is respectable, not ahead; as an example he cited a four point deficit to Carter in New York. He described California as a tossup and didn't have a fix on Texas; no polling since Carter's LBJ or Playboy gaffes (the pool's word, not his).

(MORE)

2

Cheney also repeated his prediction made in the wee hours after the first debate that within two weeks Ford would be even with or ahead of Carter in the polls.

Cheney was asked if Ford would be helped outside the South by his campaigning with (and endorsements by) such prominent segregationists as John Bell Williams and William Colmer. He said, "I don't think it hurts outside the South," adding that the question assumed a racial overtone to Southern politics which is no longer valid.

"Racism is not the issue today it was ten years ago," he claimed. He also said Ford's strong position in opposition to gun control all day long wouldn't hurt outside the South, either.

Asked if any of the politicians Ford has seen in the last two days brought up Henry Kissinger's efforts to establish black majority rule in South Africa, he said that "no one even mentioned it." As for the political fall-out in the South, "My assumption would be it does not have any impact." On the subject of the Michigan investigations allegedly involving Ford's prior campaign finances, Cheney said there are "no plans" to ask the Special Prosecutor whether the President is the target of the current investigation in Grand Rapids. "All of that stuff was reviewed previously when he was confirmed (as veep)." To ask the Special Prosecutor the question "would assume the question needs to be asked. I don't think it does." Nobody has contacted the White House asking for material on the matter.

Back to politics: Asked about Ford's political problems at the moment, Cheney cited trouble in agricultural areas--mainly because of the embargo on grain and price levels in general. Price levels are down, "and when prices are down they remember the embargo." And since areas where this is a problem are traditionally heavily Republican, Cheney pegged the farm problem as "the number one problem."

Asked for the reasons why Ford has been doing better of late, he said the debate was obviously important. The fact that Ford won in Kansas City, laying Reagan away, was also important as was the prompt reunification of the Party and the fact that "our (Presidential) strategy has proved sound in that he stayed home and focused on the people's business."

Carter has helped, too, he said, with comments on LBJ and taxes, the latter which he described as "the most significant" factor. Again he said the PLAYBOY thing might have hurt Carter but it clearly didn't help him.

As a result of all this, Cheney said that "the gap has closed much faster than expected."

Airport and hotel arrival uneventful.

Defrank/NEWSWEEK
Pierpoint/CBS
Embrey/COLUMBUS POST DISPATCH

###