

September 30, 1976

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
WILLIAM G. MILLIKEN
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

THE BRIEFING ROOM

6:22 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: Some of you have asked to have one or more spokesmen from the meeting with the President by the leaders from the key States, and one of the organizers of the meeting and the person designated as the spokesman was Governor Milliken of Michigan. So, he will be down to tell you about -- he is here to tell you about the meeting and to answer your questions about it.

Q We are going to get a list of all the participants?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Jim has a little press release from the PFC. We have a list of the participants.

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: So that will be made available to you.

Let me say first of all, I felt we had a very good and stimulating and productive meeting. Present were individuals representing Governors, representing members of the President's Cabinet, Senators, Congressmen, National Committee men and women, and a number of State chairmen from some of the larger States in the country.

Our primary purpose, because we represent some very key States across the country, was to meet with the President and to indicate to him our desire to support his efforts through a coordinated approach with the PFC in some of these very critical States.

I think in a very real sense each one of us, and a number who were not present, have very special constituencies in our own State. Each one of us, those of us particularly who have been elected, have been able to reach many independents and other groups, and it is our purpose to strengthen to the extent possible the overall campaign and to so indicate that to the President, as we did just now.

It was a good and it was a productive meeting, and I believe that now we can continue to be an even more effective force, both individually and collectively, in the campaign which is coming up.

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Q Governor, was the President doing something that he shouldn't have been doing, or should he be doing something that he wasn't doing? In other words, what changes do you want?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I don't think it is accurate to say that we want any changes at all. Most of all, we simply wanted to sit down with him to discuss the campaign, to discuss ideas where we feel as individuals or as a group that we could be effective and the whole orientation, the whole direction was to individually, within our own States, assist this campaign in the last, whatever it is, 35 days of the campaign.

This was not an attempt to suggest that the course of the campaign be altered, but simply that we more effectively, in a coordinated effort, work in these remaining days.

Q This was, though, primarily a group of more moderate and liberal Republicans. Was there anything expressed against what the President might be doing, specifically about the Southern trip last week?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: No, I think it was accurate to say, as I did a moment ago, that we do represent within our States access to large voter blocks. I have had to have them in Michigan and they will be necessary in the course of a successful Presidential campaign in our State. That was the sole purpose.

Q What did you suggest that he isn't doing?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: We talked about various areas where we think emphasis should be placed based upon the peculiar characteristics of our own States. We talked about the cities, we talked about urban areas and so on.

Q Did you suggest, for instance, that he not discuss gun control and advocate free guns for everybody in Detroit?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: If you are asking did I suggest that today, the answer is no.

Q Would you be specific and tell us what you did suggest?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I am saying essentially that we are talking about States with large populations, industrial States, States where unemployment is a major factor, where the economy is important, and I suggested, and others suggested, that we emphasize some of those areas, particularly urban problems in our major States. The President was very responsive and sensitive to that.

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Q Did he say he would come to any specific areas? Did he sketch out for you an outline of where he plans to take some of the urban and population industrial and unemployment issues?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: He didn't specify in detail or even mention a State but indicated that there certainly is a plan to move out around the country and he expressed the hope he would be in many if not all of our States.

Q Is there concern in Michigan about the investigation involving Kent County and what effect that might have on Republicans in Michigan?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I came from Kent County last night where I attended a large party gathering and, if I were to describe the feeling there, it is simply one of making available all of the information which is requested. There is a very high quality of leadership in that particular county. There has been total openness, total cooperation, a feeling that we want to get all of the information out and put the thing behind quickly.

I might say that there is a very relaxed feeling in Kent County among the Republican leadership because of their confidence in the way the records are kept and in the fact that every detail of every operation is being made available to whoever wants legitimately that information. So the feeling is quite relaxed.

Q Can't you think back, or have you thought back to anything the investigators might be looking for or are you completely puzzled as to why they would be investigating?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: Frankly, I know very little, almost nothing about it other than what I have read in the paper. I can't imagine, because this is a very well run county, and a very, very, as I say, quality leadership in that county. I feel quite relaxed about it myself.

Q Aren't you curious as to why --

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: Of course I am curious but I think it will just have to come out in due time.

Q Did he say he would campaign in Michigan some?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: He didn't specifically say so. I would express the hope here that he will be able to do so. In Michigan he happens to be doing very well; as a matter of fact the polls indicate he is doing remarkably well, that he is leading. I might add in the State of Connecticut, which is not always known as a Republican State, the latest polls indicate the President is leading there.

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Q Governor, in the kind of States represented in the meeting today, do you think the President may have hurt himself at all in those States by the kind of campaign swing he made last weekend, talking about his opposition against gun registration, embracing Governor Wallace figuratively on that podium? Do you think that hurt him at all?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I have no indication that it did hurt him. I think those of us in these larger States expect that the President will campaign and should campaign all over the country. He shouldn't concede a single State, whether it is in the West, or the South, or the East or the Midwest. These States you referred to that in the main were represented in this meeting with the President are States that are going to be very important to a successful outcome of the campaign of '76 and that is why we are there.

And I believe -- and I have expressed this very strongly -- that we can be in a very material way helpful to bring our key States into the Republican fold.

Q Besides the other general questions of jobs, health, transportation, food costs and crime, what else was discussed?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: We didn't discuss all of the items you mentioned. We didn't discuss food costs today.

Q Governor, could I just pursue this one step further? Was there any discussion of the President's golf trips?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: No.

Q Nobody expressed any views on those?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: No, there was no discussion.

Q Governor Milliken, are you satisfied with the strategy of the campaign to save up most of the heavy campaigning for the last two weeks?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: If, in fact, that is the strategy -- and I can't speak with authority on it -- but, if it were, I think that would represent a very good strategy. Obviously the President has had to be here to deal with the problems of the closing days of the Congress, and I think it is important from the public interest standpoint that he be here. If the strategy is -- and I can't speak with authority, you would have to ask the President and his campaign organization -- but if it is to move out in States like ours, then that, I think, would be very good strategy.

Q Excuse me, but I still don't understand why you came here today. Some of you have come from quite a distance from the larger northern industrial States and you talked in broad generalities about what you discussed with the President. Did you come here with a specific mission to get the President more active in the larger industrial States?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: We came here with a specific mission of, number one, making the point very clear, which the President, of course, first of all, is totally convinced of; that is, the importance of the States generally represented here. Secondly, to indicate to the President in the strongest way possible our total support in our States, given the particular and difficult problems that many of the States have, that we support his efforts in what he is trying to do. Third, and finally, saying to the President and saying to the President's campaign organization that we intend to individually and collectively work in a totally coordinated fashion with the campaign organization as it has been set up and to coordinate whatever we do so that we will achieve a maximum effectiveness.

Now, I think that makes a lot of sense.

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Q Governor, did you mean to suggest there was no discussion at this meeting of the investigation?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: No, I don't mean to suggest that at all. The question was raised and the President simply indicated, I think, because I happen to have been able to read the transcript before, essentially what he had said to you this noon.

Q Who raised the question?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I have forgotten whether he raised it or some other -- I can't tell you who did. It may have been raised by one of the State chairmen.

Q Did anybody at the meeting express concern about the impact the allegations and the mere fact that the investigation is going on might be having on the campaign?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I wouldn't express it as concern, but there was an obvious feeling, shared in fully by me, that it is important to move quickly to assemble all of the facts, draw the conclusions from them and to move on. That should be done in the interest, if nothing else, of fairness.

Q Do you think he did that today? Are you satisfied with what he said today?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I am satisfied that he expressed the very strong sentiment that he was totally open about it. He felt the investigation was perfectly appropriate and proper and, as he indicated, by quoting some victim of -- I have forgotten what the quotation is, but the sense of it was that justice is only served when it moves quickly.

Q Was Housing Secretary Carla Hills there?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: Yes, she was there.

Q Why?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: Simply because she deals in an area which is of considerable interest and concern, particularly to the States that were represented. The housing issue is a very important one in Michigan, in New York and in every other State in between.

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Q Governor, did you come down here to get President Ford to move more toward the center?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: No, it would be inaccurate to describe our mission in that fashion.

Q Governor, you leave us all a little puzzled. You sound like you came up to lead the team in a cheer. This is a long way, the President is a very busy man and you are all busy and important people. You must have had something, besides telling him that you came from important States, to talk about.

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I tell you the whole thing is to be translated into the nuts and bolts of politics an effective campaign. That is what will follow this meeting and the general discussions that we had.

Q Did you tell the President anything he did not know, where he was in trouble in some place?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: I don't know. You will have to ask him if we told him something he didn't know. We certainly gave general intelligence reports on the status of political campaigns in our States.

Q You said you indicated that unemployment and the economy are important and you urged him to discuss urban problems. I take that to mean you feel he hasn't done that quite enough?

GOVERNOR MILLIKEN: It is a question of emphasis and shading and of trying to, through our personal observations of the particular problems in our State, to suggest where some emphasis might be important as he travels through our State where issues may need to be discussed or articulated. It is the kind of usual political discussions that you have.

Are there any other questions?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 6:37 P.M. EDT)