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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

PALACE OF FINE ARTS

12:19 P.M. PDT

QUESTION: Mr. President, as Jimmy Carter was leaving the auditorium here, he said that he thought that your insensitivity towards blacks for not apologizing for the Earl Butz affair made that a legitimate issue for this foreign policy debate. How do you answer that?

THE PRESIDENT: It seems to me that Governor Carter ought to think back to his comment about ethnic purity which was interpreted to be a slur against blacks, and his subsequent apology. I don't think his record is clear in itself. I think we took the appropriate action in the way we handled the Butz matter.

QUESTION: No apology was appropriate, then?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Earl Butz did apologize. Earl Butz did get a reprimand by me. That was done several days before his resignation. But I think it is appropriate to bring up the fact that a few months ago Governor Carter, with his ethnic purity comment, did slur blacks and he apologized. Earl Butz did likewise.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Jimmy Carter says that when you two debate tonight, you will be debating as equals. Do you agree with that?

THE PRESIDENT: I will let the American people decide that.

QUESTION: Mr. President, some of your aides have indicated that you, as President of the United States, will have more constraints on you tonight than Jimmy Carter will. I don't understand why this is so. Can you explain? Or do you believe that?

THE PRESIDENT: I will speak very frankly. I believe that a President under these circumstances, who has got a good record, can speak forthrightly, straightforwardly and frankly, and I intend to do that.

QUESTION: So you see no constraints?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't see any.

MORE

(OVER)

QUESTION: Do you plan to make any new announcements tonight in terms of foreign policy and defense initiatives?

THE PRESIDENT: Listen carefully.

QUESTION: That is a hint, Mr. President, isn't it?
(Laughter)

QUESTION: Are you going to be more aggressive tonight than you were at the other debate?

THE PRESIDENT: Ann, we will wait and see.

QUESTION: What is the answer to Helen's question?

QUESTION: It sounds like you have got something new up your sleeve.

THE PRESIDENT: I just said that you should listen carefully.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you feel about this report by the Congressional investigators, the General Accounting Office, criticizing your handling of the MAYAGUEZ incident?

THE PRESIDENT: It is always very easy for someone 18 months after a very critical issue has taken place to write a report. Of course, none of those "Johnny-come-lately" Monday morning critics were there when the incident happened. So, they didn't have to make the minute-by-minute decision. I can't help but feel that the issuance of that report at this time is another example of partisan politics, and I don't think the American people will believe somebody who, with the luxury of 18 months afterward, can sit back and write a report. I think they will believe a President who was there and had to make decisions on an incident that was important to the American foreign policy.

QUESTION: How important is tonight's debate in the overall campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: They are all very, very important, and I look at this one as important, and I look at the one on the 22nd as important.

QUESTION: This one has no special significance?

THE PRESIDENT: They are all very important.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 12:24 P.M. PDT)