

October 10, 1976

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
JIM BAKER

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE

MR. BAKER: I thought we might start out by reviewing the progress of our campaign to date.

We think that we have had, during the five weeks of this campaign -- we have had four outstanding weeks. We recognize that this last week has been less than outstanding. However, we think that this is something to be expected. We would think that in a campaign such as this that there would be peaks and valleys.

We are extremely pleased with the results of our Oklahoma and Texas visits for the last two days. We think that the crowds have been large and enthusiastic -- in Lawton, Oklahoma, along the parade route in Dallas, and again at the State Fair in Dallas.

We would point to a Darden poll which was released here recently showing that the Carter lead in the South overall is slipping, and I would like to make specific mention of the results --

Q Results of what?

MR. BAKER: A recent Darden poll.

Q Spell it.

MR. BAKER: D-a-r-d-e-n. And I would specifically point to the results of our telephone canvassing in Texas, which I just got late yesterday afternoon, which shows that we are leading in the State of Texas. And we are very enthusiastic about our prospects for carrying both Texas and Oklahoma, which were two States, Phil, which we were really given very little chance in some five or six weeks ago.

Q Is this the first time the polls show you ahead in Texas?

MR. BAKER: This is the first time they have shown us ahead in Texas. I hasten to point out this is our own telephone canvass in Texas.

Q This kind of poll that is canvassing --

MR. BAKER: No, this is not an opinion poll. This is our own canvass. But we were very pleased. I would tell you very candidly that our most recent poll in Texas doesn't show us ahead. The Market Opinion Research poll shows us very close but not ahead.

Q Was this taken at about the same time the canvass was taken?

MR. BAKER: The canvass has been taken over a period of three weeks, Phil, and the poll was completed, I think, about a week ago.

Q Do you use the one, two, three, four, five system on your canvassing?

MR. BAKER: You mean the questions?

Q No, one for committed; two for --

MR. BAKER: No, we use for or against and undecided in our telephone canvassing.

Q Did you finish your statement?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that is it.

Q I was just going to ask, you used similar language yesterday when we arrived in Dallas about it being a less than outstanding week. Why do you think so?

MR. BAKER: Well, we would acknowledge that we hit a bump over the course of the last week with the Butz matter, with the Eastern European clarification. I would like to point out in that connection that this is the first time in five weeks that the President has clarified any statement that he has made in the course of this campaign, or that it has been felt that it has been necessary to clarify any statement.

I would like to point to at least six instances in which Mr. Carter has clarified campaign statements, starting with the middle income taxation statement, the tax on church property statement, the Playboy interview, the statement with respect to LBJ, the Clarence Kelley statement, and his statement back during the primaries regarding the ethnic purity of neighborhoods. Those are all statements that Mr. Carter has felt compelled to explain if not issue an outright apology.

Q And at this point, Jim, I think it would be fair to say that he will have to now explain why he said on the TV show that he had never proposed a \$15 billion budget cut for the Defense Department, which he clearly did on at least two occasions. So, that will presumably be the next item he will have to clarify.

MR. BAKER: The \$15 billion defense cut statement was on my list, and I simply omitted it.

Q Can I pursue that one step further? Could you characterize the President's campaign at this point after this past week?

MR. BAKER: I would characterize it as having hit a bump that did slow us down for a week. We feel we have regained the momentum with our very successful forays into Oklahoma and into Texas.

I would like also to mention the fact that it was only some five or six weeks ago that a lot of people were writing us out of this race altogether. We now see a situation where there are independent polls, national polls, indicating that the race is dead even. There are other national polls that show that we are slightly behind by some six to seven points.

Q How do you plan on closing this, this five to six points that you say are there? Do you think there is a possibility that you could come up too quickly and then start going down again?

MR. BAKER: Phil, I have said all along that when you start 18 or 23 points behind, you don't worry about peaking too soon, and that is not something that is going to concern us.

We think we have had the momentum throughout this campaign except for this one week. We feel that we have regained it with very successful visits in Oklahoma and Texas. We have a campaign strategy that we think is the right one. It is one that has been successful to date and it is one that we are going to continue to pursue.

Q What effect will the Reverend Criswell endorsement of the President have on the campaign?

MR. BAKER: We think Reverend Criswell's support will be important to us. He is an acknowledged leader not only among Southern Baptists but also among Evangelicals, and we think that his support will be influential and will be quite helpful.

Q Have you got a Teeter poll yet on the debate itself, I mean your own thing as to the won-lost thing, purely of the debate?

MR. BAKER: The answer is, no, we do not have that yet. We are polling and we expect to have something in the early part of next week.

Q On the debate or at various stages, how?

MR. BAKER: It will go beyond just the debate. It will be the results of our second polls in many States, but it will have a debate question in there.

Q There will be a debate panel inside the sample; is that correct?

MR. BAKER: There will be a debate question inside the panel, that is correct.

Q You, from the start, have sort of dismissed this Eastern European thing. You have had trouble acknowledging that it was going to be an issue and then finding you did have a number of clarifications. How much damage do you think that has caused?

MR. BAKER: I think that the major effect, Phil, has been that it contributed to the slowdown in our campaign of last week. That is the major damage, it seems to me.

I think the President has explained the fact that he was not as precise in his answer as perhaps he should have been. I think he has pointed to his strong support of the captive nations of Eastern Europe under the Captive Nations Resolution. I think he has pointed out that it has been the policy of his Administration never to accept and acknowledge Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Therefore, I don't think that it is going to have a major effect among those people who believe in that cause.

Q So, then, there is no thought of going back to the Rose Garden where you were quite successful?

MR. BAKER: Frank, that was not in our strategy to begin with. I might say that we don't see that the slowdown is in any way occasioned by the fact that we are out of the White House more than we were during September. We always said in September that we were going to be out once a week. We followed that strategy. We were out all last week and, if you will think back, we were out the week before most of the week, including the Southern trip.

Q Isn't this lingering controversy in the press about what the Special Prosecutor is up to with the President's past campaign finance records causing problems?

MR. BAKER: Well, Phil, you know as much about that as we do. You heard the President's statements on it --

Q The point is, the President says no, there is nothing wrong, nothing improper, and the next day there is a headline about the Prosecutor doing something, being up to something. This is bound to hurt, isn't it?

MR. BAKER: We would prefer to see it disposed of, but again we know nothing more -- I know nothing more than you fellows know, having talked to the President in the Oval Office about it.

Q That is my question -- what does this do to the President politically as this lingers on unresolved?

MR. BAKER: All I can say to that is we would be delighted to see it resolved.

Q Do you think maybe this is part of the effort by the other side to keep this thing going and never have it resolved until after the election?

MR. BAKER: I have said all I want to say on the subject because it is pure speculation. You know everything we know about it.

Q Can I ask you about the Butz resignation? You mentioned that as one of the elements which you think contributed to the slowdown, I believe. Do you feel that the President, in his visits to Texas and Oklahoma, managed to offset that?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think that, as I indicated earlier, I firmly believe that we have regained whatever momentum we lost as a result of the Butz situation and the clarification with respect to the remark in the debate.

Q After the first debate, Carter didn't make any bones about the fact that he felt he hadn't been aggressive enough, and he would be more aggressive in the second debate, which he apparently was. I got the impression towards the end of this week that the President himself was becoming a little more vociferous and aggressive. Is that something he is going to continue in the third debate and throughout the campaign?

MR. BAKER: I wouldn't want to speak to the debate, because I think that that decision is still perhaps to be made with respect to the debate, but I would expect to see the President get somewhat more aggressive in his campaign appearances, not to the point that Governor Carter has reached when he calls the President more secretive than Richard Nixon or a worse President than Richard Nixon. We think that those are rather, it seems to us, desperate-type tactics or desperate remarks.

Q Democratic National Chairman Bob Strauss is saying the same thing of the President's attacks on Carter, saying that he is doing it because he is desperate, he has had a very bad week, to quote Mr. Strauss.

MR. BAKER: I don't think the President has attacked Governor Carter in the manner in which I am referring to here in the article by David Broder in the Washington Post this morning.

I noted also a piece, Charlie, in your paper, where they quote the Carter camp as claiming that the election is clinched.

Q Really, I don't know what the point of asking this is, but in really frank terms, what do you think your chances are of winning this thing?

MR. BAKER: We think our chances are a lot better of winning this now than they were five or six weeks ago when we started and when people were writing us off. We think frankly we are going to win it. We are very optimistic. I might again say I would point to the fact that we have had one clarification called for in the five weeks of this campaign.

Q Is the Eastern European thing a critical thing for your campaign as a whole in the Great Lakes arc of industrial Midwestern States? How bad is this ethnic thing for you there? Have you taken any kind of reading of that -- not the polls so much, but the pure, really respected political types that you deal with -- have you got an idea of how much this hurt you in Catholic-American ethnic voters from Illinois to Pennsylvania?

MR. BAKER: As I indicated earlier, I think it might have hurt had the President not explained it, and I believe that he did explain it in his statement of clarification in Southern California. I also believe that these voters know of his long record of support of the Captive Nations Resolution. I think these voters know that he cared enough as President of the United States to journey to these nations and he is the first President, I think, that has done so since Yalta Tehran.

Q I think there are a lot of people who didn't think that really represented the President's opinions but viewed it as a different problem, a clumsy performance under the stress of the debate; that it was not his real opinion but he found himself in the position of using declarative sentences which made it sound that way.

MR. BAKER: I would totally disagree with that, and again I would point to the fact that this --

Q I am just referring to the political aspects. Do you think there is a problem that grows out, not of the policy but of the impression left of sort of grace or the lack of it?

MR. BAKER: No, and that is what I was about to say in my answer. I would point to the fact that our opponent has felt compelled to explain at least six or seven things over the course of this campaign, misstatements, and I would also point to the fact in the first debate he was asked a question about whether he believed in -- Governor Carter now -- whether he believed in an incomes policy, and he didn't even understand the question. He started talking about a guaranteed annual income.

It seems to me to be a far worse faux pas.

Q Just one other question. The economy is really sort of altering a little bit. It is not going as you would like it. I am wondering, politically is this going to cause problems in the campaign?

MR. BAKER: We have been saying for some time that the recovery would continue but it would not continue at as fast a pace. We were delighted to note that the unemployment rate did fall, Phil, yesterday, and at least the unemployment rate is trending in the right direction.

THE PRESS: Thank you.