

OCTOBER 18, 1976

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
HOWARD H. BAKER, JR.
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF TENNESSEE
LOWELL P. WEICKER, JR.
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT
JAMES E. HOLSHOUSER, JR.
GOVERNOR FROM THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
AND
JAMES B. EDWARDS
GOVERNOR FROM THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE BRIEFING ROOM

4:55 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: In response to some of your questions and inquiries, we asked representatives of the Senators and Governors to come out and answer your questions today. We have Senator Howard Baker of Tennessee, Governor Jim Edwards of South Carolina, Governor Jim Holshouser of North Carolina, Senator Lowell Weicker of Connecticut and Jim Baker, who is the chairman of the PFC.

I think Senator Baker has been designated as sort of an unofficial spokesman for the group in terms of a short opening statement, and then the others will be happy to answer your questions.

SENATOR BAKER: Ladies and gentlemen, we met a representative group of candidates, officials and friends of the President for about an hour and a half this afternoon to talk about the status of the campaign and our prospects for the next 15 days.

Most of us have traveled in other parts of the country, as well as our own States. We were briefed on the general statistical situation, on the poll results, on the situation as we found it in the several States we traveled in in our own areas.

The President's general attitude was one of optimism. He was pleased -- as all of us are pleased -- that in the course of a relatively brief time he has come from a position that was far behind, shortly after the Democratic National Convention, to the place where now, by all descriptions, the race is virtually a dead heat.

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He thinks, as we think, that the election is still to be won. We think that the momentum is on our side, and prospects for a victory are very good indeed.

Q Senator, the revelations today in the General Brown interview, do you think that might impede the campaign at all? Do you think the General might perhaps deserve to be dismissed?

SENATOR BAKER: I have not heard the interview. We have been either traveling today or with the President this afternoon. I am afraid I will have to defer to somebody else who knows about that interview. I do not.

Q When did you find out about the meeting today?

SENATOR BAKER: I got a telegram from the President on Saturday, I believe, inviting me to the meeting today.

Q Do you think the President is pursuing the proper course now in staying in the White House the rest of the week, and do you think the debates will be the crucial point of the --

SENATOR BAKER: Helen, I think the debate will be a crucial event. It is the third and last, of course, of the debates. Each one has caused its own little eddy current. It has always produced a winner and a loser in the public reception, and no doubt the third one will, as well. It will have some effect, but I am convinced the debates will not be the determining factor they were in the election of 1960.

Q What will be?

SENATOR BAKER: I think the question of something old and something new. I think Governor Carter is offering more of the same, the typical and traditional Democratic concepts of more and more and bigger and bigger Government and higher and higher spending and taxes. I think the Republican point of view is something new and different: The courage to innovate, the idea of returning power to the people in the country, returning power to State and local Governments, exercising a frugality that will let this Administration offer a tax cut to the American people. I think that makes the distinction, and I think that would be far more important than the debates.

Q Why do you think the President is so optimistic, and why are you so optimistic?

SENATOR BAKER: The first reason I am optimistic -- and I can only surmise the President's optimism -- is the one I just stated. It takes a good horse to catch up to the pack, the way the President has caught up since the first poll results after the Democratic National Convention. He has come a long way. He is now, I think, in a dead heat race and he has covered a lot of territory and gained a lot of ground in a relatively brief period of time. I think that by itself implies an enthusiasm and efficiency in the campaign that is likely to carry him to victory. I believe he feels that optimism based on that and other causes.

Q Did you gentlemen have any advice to the President as to where he should concentrate in the last ten days and where he ought to go?

SENATOR BAKER: The President and his staff did go over his campaign schedule between now and election day. It will be a full and vigorous schedule. I am not at liberty to give that schedule at this time except to say he will cover most of the areas of the country. It will be a very, very busy time for the President. He will be on the trail. I think it is a good schedule. I think he has planned these last 15 days of the campaign very efficiently, and I think the result will be a very effective, final campaign.

Q Senator Weicker, you sometimes march to a different drummer. Don't tell me that you spent one hour and a half complimenting each other on how much momentum the President has generated and how great the campaign is coming. You certainly must have discussed for 90 minutes some problems you had and, if so, what are the problems?

SENATOR WEICKER: First of all, as one of the few in the room that is running himself, I think I can bring a firsthand report back from the front. Connecticut, I think, in its demographics is very much a microcosm of the country. I think the surprising thing in my own State is the strength the President is showing.

Right now, the Carter-Ford race in Connecticut is neck and neck, with possibly even a slight edge to the President. So, in that sense, in the sense of statistics, yes, there is good news.

Now, in the sense of what is important to the voters this year, that is what I want to report on. Very frankly, regardless of other peoples' perceptions of what a Presidential campaign ought to be about, to the average guy on the street it still ought to deal with the dreams of this country and the solution of its problems, not a lot of gossip and trivia.

Very frankly, it is that road which I feel is going to be traveled and has been traveled by the President. Whatever Mr. Carter wants to do, he can do. I don't think he wears very well. I don't think his tactics are wearing very well. The people, as I said, still very much so -- as a matter of fact, because of the disappointments of the past several years -- want to give the admiration and respect to the office of the President that it deserves.

So, my own feeling is that what you are going to see is a very strong and very positive effort on the part of the President in the ten or 15 days left.

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Q Senator, there was a group in last week and Senator Javits came out at the end of the meeting and said he and others advised the President that he should start "getting after Carter" directly and start calling them as he sees them, to go at Jimmy Carter directly, and the President seemed to do that over the weekend. Are you saying that may be a mistake to make --

SENATOR WEICKER: All I am saying is getting after Jimmy Carter is not going to employ one more person, it is not going to house one more individual. I don't give two cents' worth for Mr. Carter's campaign or anything on that side of the line. I very much care about the President, about the Republican Party. To me, they are the positive force in this campaign. So, no, I would not give -- and I didn't give -- advice to go after Mr. Carter. I don't care about Mr. Carter.

Q Did you get any ideas of how he is going to increase employment in this country?

SENATOR WEICKER: We discussed, as I say, the generalities of the campaign. There were not specific issues that were gone over.

Q Senator Baker, Senator Weicker seems to be suggesting the "going after Jimmy Carter campaign" was a mistake, that it should not be followed through.

SENATOR WEICKER: If I may speak for myself, I am not saying that was a mistake. I am not saying that was the campaign. What I am saying to you is that persons all over, within politics and outside of politics, have had a different perception of what it is the American people are looking for in this campaign. They are not all sitting there reading Playboy Magazine, believe me. (Laughter) The Presidency of the United States is of far greater importance.

Q Senator, since you consider Connecticut to be a microcosm of the United States, did you invite the President up to Connecticut to campaign before election day?

SENATOR WEICKER: When we invited the President to our convention, where he made a major speech -- and that was, as you recall, the last convention at the end of July -- we realized that would sort have been our shot at his time during the course of the election year. He is more than welcome back in the State at any time.

Q Do you expect him to be back in the State before the election?

SENATOR WEICKER: I have seen his schedule and he is not scheduled to actually be in Connecticut, although close to the area. Let me make it clear he is welcome, but we also understood when he spent the time he did in July, that that would probably have to cover his campaign.

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Q Governor Holshouser, Senator Ervin had an interview over the weekend at a station in Charlotte, at which time he said that as far as he was concerned what President Ford did back during the early days of Watergate constituted a partisan attempt to cut off the investigation.

Do you think that will have any effect on the campaign? Did you discuss that with the President?

GOVERNOR HOLSHOUSER: I did not discuss it with him. I think it will have no effect on the campaign.

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Q Governor Holshouser, Mr. Baker -- not Senator, but Mr. Baker -- told us on the train in Illinois on Saturday that he believed that the President was making a comeback in the South, particularly in the two Carolinas, and was running a stronger campaign in two States that in the earlier stages looked like they were shoo-ins for Carter. Is that true? What evidence do you have of it?

GOVERNOR HOLSHOUSER: No question about that. I will let Governor Edwards speak for South Carolina, but in North Carolina, I have seen two polls within the last week. One showed us 1-1/2 points ahead and the other showed us 2 points behind. Given the margin of error for polls, we just consider it neck to neck.

I think it has been a rather remarkable turn-around in our State. Certainly, the South is not going to be solid for Jimmy Carter as many once thought, perhaps on a variety of reasons, one being that Southerners still take a great deal of pride in this country and I think it has gone over very poorly in the South as Mr. Carter has seen to attack America, our defense posture, and this sort of thing.

Secondly, the South still has a very strong feeling about religion, and I don't think that the article in Playboy has helped at all in the Carter campaign. Very clearly, the President is coming on much stronger in the South, and we think it is going to do very well.

Q How are you overcoming the peanut busses that are going into the towns and hamlets with the workers, distributing all the Carter literature? Are you doing anything in your State to overcome that?

GOVERNOR HOLSHOUSER: Well, whatever is going on must be overcoming it, because we have pulled even. Obviously, we have been gearing hard to our county fairs. The State Fair is on this week in Raleigh. We have been gearing hard with our local organizations, with radio and newspaper advertising, and obviously a lot of people working hard at mill gates and blitzes, this sort of thing.

Q Governor Edwards, what about South Carolina? I think we are going to South Carolina.

GOVERNOR EDWARDS: In South Carolina we have come from about 30 points behind until this recent poll shows us that we are 2 points behind in one poll and dead even in another poll.

Q Who are these polls by that everybody is citing? Are they by the Ford campaign or by the State Republican Party?

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GOVERNOR EDWARDS: We have several polls that have been done, one by the Ford campaign and one by a series of Congressional campaigns within our State, and they are all pretty well the same. You can see the erosion of the difference in the polls that has taken place since the Republican Convention. But we are right next door to Jimmy Carter's home State and the people of South Carolina perceive Jimmy Carter like most people in America perceive him, as being a reasonably sound, conservative man.

But today the American people, and particularly those people in South Carolina, as he takes the hard positions that have to be taken in the campaign -- they perceive him as not the man that is a Southern person philosophically. He may be a Southerner geographically, but I think as the campaign has worn on, I think Jimmy Carter has done more than anyone else to close this gap for us.

We are aware of his lack of accomplishment in the State of Georgia. I think he really purposely tried to mislead the American people in the first debate when he talked about his great accomplishments in the State of Georgia. If you remember, he said that he reorganized the State of Georgia and brought it from a certain number of units of government down to 22, I believe, and he said, "My last year in office I decreased the number of people on the payrolls of the State of Georgia 2 percent."

But what he failed to tell the American people was during his four years as the Governor of Georgia the number of people on the payrolls of that State increased 25 percent.

Q Is the President going to South Carolina Saturday to a fair and a football game?

GOVERNOR EDWARDS: He has an invitation and we certainly hope he will fill that invitation, and I hope his plans will include us, yes.

Q I would like to put a question to Senators Weicker and Baker. As Members of the Watergate Committee, how do you assess Ford's role in dealing with the Patman investigation of Watergate in 1972?

SENATOR WEICKER: I am not in a position to comment on what went on in the House, but I am going to say one thing flat-out right now. I think Republicans had as much to do with bringing forth the truth of Watergate as anybody in this country. Specifically, I am referring to Senator Baker and myself. And, very frankly, I very much resent the implications that for some reason -- either in a partisan way or as it attaches to certain individuals -- through some story that has not been told, that there is any sort of coverup going on.

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Now, look, many of the people that complain -- Howard and I didn't have their help during the investigation, that is for sure. So, I have no apologies to make.

As I said, I am not in a position to comment on activities that transpired in the House. That wasn't my job. But, I know the American people have the truth and as much of that truth as they got was due to the efforts of Republicans as it was anybody else.

Q You say they have the whole truth?

SENATOR WEICKER: I sure do.

Q There is nothing left to be said?

SENATOR WEICKER: They have the truth as much as anybody has. I remind you, our efforts on that committee had to be an effort in the absence of any tapes. Our reports had to be issued without any tapes, and certainly added to the general knowledge.

But, as I said before, to me this business here, you know, is going to go on just so long and then all of a sudden I think it is fair enough that we get evaluated for the people that we are rather than tying in here, tying in there, and the lack of any specific fact or any specific truth.

Howard can speak for himself.

SENATOR BAKER: Let me make a remark along the same lines as Senator Weicker's remark. I suppose in light of circumstances in recent political history that for Republicans Watergate is an inevitable issue, and for Democrats it is probably irresistible. But I think by the same token Watergate has been pretty well metabolized for the country. I think the country pretty much knows what it thinks about that unhappy era. I think they have assigned blame and meted out their punishment, and I think it is a pretty cheap shot for the Democrats -- particularly for Jimmy Carter -- to keep referring to it and trying to bring it up.

You know that was a sad time, but I think the Republicans acted in an honorable and decent way in those hearings. It was a painful and a difficult time for all of us. Lowell Weicker knows that, I know that, and every other Member of the Congress of the United States on the Republican side knows that. But we did a difficult thing, an embarrassing thing, even a politically humiliating thing, and I think the country has that behind them.

So, as I say, for Republicans I suppose it is inevitably a piece of conversation; for Democrats, I judge it to be irresistible. But I think it will backfire on the Democrats who try to use it.

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Q I am not talking about Congress. I am talking about the former White House Counsel under a Republican Administration, what he said.

SENATOR BAKER: You are talking about Mr. Cook?

Q I am talking about John W. Dean.

SENATOR BAKER: I really don't know a thing about the circumstances except what we learned in the course of our investigation. I never talked to John Dean about it and it is my understanding, from reading newspaper accounts, that he did not talk directly to any of the principals involved. I know the President of the United States has said when he was in the House he did not try to instruct that investigation. I know I have no evidence he did.

Q He voted against it.

SENATOR BAKER: I do not believe it is an issue and I do not believe it ought to be an issue in this campaign.

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Q He said he discussed the whole situation of blocking it and he voted against having an investigation in the House.

SENATOR BAKER: Helen, that is a very great difference, between voting not to have an investigation in the House and trying to prevent an investigation at all. Clearly there was an investigation. The Senate carried on the most extraordinary and detailed investigation I believe in the history of the Congress, and Jerry Ford certainly made no effort to prevent that.

Q I am talking about 1972, during the election campaign when an investigation was blocked.

SENATOR BAKER: And I am speaking of the Congress investigating the Watergate episode. It sure as the dickens was investigated and I am saying Jerry Ford had nothing to do with trying to stop that painful and difficult investigation.

Q Senators Baker and Weicker, do you see any reason why President Ford should not permit the tapes to be made public now in the areas that are under dispute about this 1972 investigation?

SENATOR BAKER: That is up to the President. I have no knowledge about what is on the tapes.

Q What would you think? What is your view, that they should be made public to clear the record once and for all now or that they should remain as they are?

SENATOR BAKER: I think in the absence of an allegation or charge of criminal misconduct, as there was in the Watergate case -- and we had a celebrated lawsuit over it -- in the absence of a charge of criminal misconduct that those tapes should not helter skelter be released. I think there is still an element of confidentiality in the conduct of the Presidency.

Q Could I ask a question about economics? Since the fiscal year 1977 in Congress all the appropriations have been appropriated. How can they get the economy rolling before two years -- even Mr. Carter admitted it would take two years.

SENATOR BAKER: I have great confidence in the economy. In the immediate future, I think if we continue on an upward trend at a slow, steady pace, I think next year is going to be a very good year.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 5:10 P.M. EDT)