

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 39

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

2:00 P.M. EDT  
October 20, 1976  
Wednesday

In the East Room  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

THE PRESIDENT: Won't you all sit down.

It is easier to get in the Rose Garden. I guess we had better go back to it. We just had a door knob break off. (Laughter)

QUESTION: That is a sign of the times.

THE PRESIDENT: You can't blame that on me, Helen?

QUESTION: Mr. President, regardless of the allegations of influences at the time, and in view of the long national nightmare we went through, do you have any regrets, any remorse for the role that you played in helping to block the first investigation of one of the worst White House scandals in history? And I have a follow-up.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't believe what I did in working with the Republican Members of the House Committee on Banking and Currency was a blocking of an investigation of Watergate. I did that because the Republican Members of that committee specifically asked me to get them together.

Now what that committee would have done was, as I understood it, to investigate a very limited part of certain campaign activities. It didn't have any intention or have any program to do anything beyond that.

So, what I did was at the request of the responsible people on the Banking and Currency Committee and, under the circumstances, as I knew it then, I think I would do exactly the same thing.

QUESTION: Well, Mr. President, there also is a widespread speculation that you may pardon Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman as all part of the same package. Is there any validity to that?

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THE PRESIDENT: There is absolutely no validity whatsoever to that rumor. In fact, you are the first one that has raised it with me, so I want you to know it and I want everybody else to know it. There is no credence whatsoever to it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the past week, two top men in your Administration -- FBI Chief Clarence Brown, and General George -- I mean Clarence Kelley and General George Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- have come under criticism for their comments involving curbs on the press and aid to Israel.

I want to know, have you made any comment on this? What is your view of this incident, and if you are elected would you keep these two men in these responsible jobs?

THE PRESIDENT: I am glad that the Counsel of the White House, through the Attorney General, did stop what I understood was to be a speech by Clarence Kelley. From what I know about the speech, I think it would have been ill-advised and would not reflect the views of President Ford in his relationship with the press.

Now, General Brown had an interview six or eight months ago. It was released at a time when I am certain that General Brown didn't anticipate it would be released, and it was released in part and not in whole.

General Brown, after consulting with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, did appear before the press, both of them, and explained the entire context of the interview. The total interview would lead any reasonable person to a different interpretation than the excerpts that were taken from it and were released to the press.

I happen to believe General Brown and I have reviewed the whole text of that interview myself. Some of those statements were impudent (imprudent) and were ill-advised, and I certainly don't believe that General Brown, in that position, ought to make those kind of comments in several instances, but I also don't believe it was fair in the prospective or released text that certain excerpts should be taken, and several of them taken out of context.

Now General Brown was just recommended by me and he was confirmed by the Senate for a two-year term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I would expect him to stay. He has a superb military record -- 35 years of devoted service in wartime -- and I think he has been a fine Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But he made one or two ill-advised statements and I hope and trust that he won't do it again.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you would keep both him and Mr. Kelly in their jobs?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, because I think Clarence Kelly has taken a very serious situation in the F.B.I. I think he straightened it out and I think he is a person that all of us can have trust in as far as the job as the job as the Director of the F.B.I.

QUESTION: Mr. President, at your last news conference you said that the campaign to date had been, quoting you, "mired in questions that have little bearing on the future of this nation," and that you would try to elevate the level of the discourse from there on. Subsequently you seemed to be preoccupied with suggesting that Mr. Carter was a dissembler and again to use your words, "an individual who waivers, wanders, wiggles and waffles," and your campaign organization has sponsored reproductions in advertisements of the front cover of Playboy Magazine. Is that what you meant by elevating the level of the discourse?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is graphic and accurate to say that Mr. Carter does waiver, wander, wiggle and waffle. There are plenty of illustrations, as a matter of fact, that that is true. Now the language is a little graphic, but there is nothing personal about it. I didn't attack his integrity or anything close to that. Now Mr. Carter did have an interview in Playboy Magazine. I haven't looked at the magazine. I am sure there are about seven million Americans, I understand, who will look at it and will probably read the article. (Laughter) But I reiterate what I said once before, I turned down an invitation by Playboy Magazine to have an interview such as Mr. Carter did. These are all factual statements either by myself or factual statements as to an interview that he had in a certain magazine.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Mr. Carter yesterday said that if he was elected he would end the Arab boycott. I wonder if you consider this a legitimate matter --

THE PRESIDENT: You mean the Arab oil embargo or the Arab boycott?

QUESTION: The Arab boycott on Israel -- I misspoke. I wonder if you consider this a legitimate objective and if you would like to do the same thing?

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THE PRESIDENT: The Ford Administration is the only Administration since 1952 when the Arab boycott went into effect that has done anything in the Executive Branch of the government. Now Mr. Carter says that he would end it -- very short sentence. I resent the inference of that. The Arab boycott was initiated in 1952. In effect he is saying that President Eisenhower didn't do anything, that President Kennedy didn't do anything about it, that President Johnson didn't do anything about it, President Nixon didn't do anything about it, and he infers I haven't, and of course he is inaccurate there. But I resent that he is challenging those other four Presidents-- Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon -- because I know they opposed the Arab boycott just as much as I do and as much as Mr. Carter does. And I wonder if anybody can be so naive as to say in one sentence that he is going to do something that four other outstanding individuals didn't do even though they opposed the same thing, and I think it is ridiculous for him to make that kind of an allegation.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, since your nomination, your decision to choose Robert Dole as Vice President has been one of the most important ones you have had to make. His record both during the campaign and in Congress has been one of extreme partisanship; for example, in his support of nominations to the Supreme Court of Haynesworth and Carswell and his actions on the Watergate investigation.

What can you point to in his career that shows that he has that judgment, that initiative and that leadership that Americans are looking for in a Vice President and potential President?

THE PRESIDENT: He served in the House of Representatives and in the United States Senate, I think, for 16 years. I believe that his record as a Representative and as a Senator is an excellent record. In fact, it is a record of longer tenure than Senator Mondale.

So, on that basis, he is better qualified than Senator Mondale. They have different philosophies. Mondale is a very liberal Senator, and Dole is a moderate to conservative, but I think Bob Dole, on the basis of his record of service in the Congress, is fully qualified to be Vice President.

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I could go back to that Playboy interview for a moment, sir, if you haven't read it or seen Playboy, why do you think it is fair to criticize Mr. Carter about it.

THE PRESIDENT: I have read the article. I haven't read it in the magazine.

QUESTION: Well, if I could follow up on that, when you criticize him, is it because you specifically disagreed with some things that he said in that, or is it because of the political benefit that a person might be expected to get in criticizing Playboy Magazine?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know why Mr. Carter agreed to the interview. That is not for me to judge. That was a decision made by him. I don't think a President of the United States ought to have an interview in a magazine that has that format. It is a personal conviction.

QUESTION: Mr. President, a moment ago, when you were talking about the Arab boycott, you were accusing Mr. Carter of inferring that previous Presidents had done nothing about it, but you prefaced that with a statement that the Ford Administration is the only one that had done anything about it since 1952. Aren't you and Mr. Carter making the same accusations.

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THE PRESIDENT: I have done it. He says that he is going to end it. I think the affirmative action that I have taken -- and it has been proven, I think, helpful, because of what has transpired since I think it was October 7 when the actual order was issued that would force companies who had participated to have their names revealed -- I think this will be a big deterrent. I hope it will.

I am against that Arab boycott, but I repeat, I am the first President that has taken any affirmative action, and I think the way that Mr. Carter stated it was a reflection on previous Presidents who I know felt as strongly as he does that an Arab boycott is contrary to the philosophy that we as Americans have.

QUESTION: If you are saying that previous Presidents did nothing about it, aren't you, in effect, making the same accusation against him?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I said he said they had not done anything about it.

QUESTION: You have said the Ford Administration is the only one that has done anything.

THE PRESIDENT: Anything that is required that companies put their name on the line that they participated or had received information, that is correct.

QUESTION: During your last debate with Jimmy Carter, Mr. Carter stated that if there was another Arab oil boycott and he was President of the United States, he would break that boycott by countering it with a boycott of our own.

Mr. President, do you think this is a realistic possibility? Could the United States break down an Arab boycott or embargo by penalizing them by refusing to sell materials to them and, secondly, even if it is realistic, would it be in the best interest of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: My answer would be that I would not tolerate an Arab oil embargo, but I add very quickly in the current atmosphere, because of the leadership of the Ford Administration, you aren't going to have an Arab oil embargo. Let me tell you why.

In 1973, we had the Yom Kippur War. That was settled. We had the Sinai I agreement, followed by the Sinai II agreement.

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This Administration in the Sinai II agreement was able to expand the peace effort in the Middle East because the Arab nations on the one hand and Israel on the other trust the Ford Administration.

You won't find among Arab nations today the same attitude that prevailed at the time of the Yom Kippur War. You won't find the possibilities of another Middle East war today that you had in 1973. So, the probabilities of an Arab oil embargo are virtually nil because of the leadership of this Administration.

Now, furthermore, I do not agree with the proposed recommendation of Mr. Carter, if there was one. He said he would cut off food, he would cut off trade, he would cut off military arms.

I think we can avoid any Arab oil embargo and not have to resort to cutting off food that American farmers have produced and sell abroad in order to help our economy here at home.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, many people are saying that the candidates are showing no vision. What is your vision for America?

THE PRESIDENT: My vision for America, first, is that we shall be a Nation at peace as we are today. My vision of the next four years is also that we will have a better quality of life; that we will have our younger people having a better opportunity for quality education; that every person who wants a job will have a job; that the best health care will be available, at prices people can afford; that we will have a record of safety and security in the streets of America for those 215 million Americans who ought to be able to walk in their community or any other part of the country without the threat of crime. My vision would also include an opportunity for greater recreation capability.

In other words, peace, a job, better health, better education, no crime or control over the criminal situation, and a better opportunity for recreation -- those are the visions that I have.

QUESTION: Many people, though, are asking whether you truly have a vision for the underprivileged, whether you really care.

THE PRESIDENT: When you say a job for everybody who wants to work, I think that certainly indicates that you have a deep concern for the people who are disadvantaged, unemployed.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I wonder if you have made any wagers with your family, friends or staff about what the popular and electoral vote will be on November 2?

THE PRESIDENT: I haven't made any wagers with my family as to the outcome, but all of us -- my four children, Betty and myself -- believe that when the votes are finally counted, the American people will want four years of the progress we made in the last two, and a better America during that period. But there are no wagers as to whether we are going to win or not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the comment by Secretary Butz that led to his resignation was made in response to a question about the commitment of this Administration to blacks and other minorities. What is the commitment of this Administration? What plans do you have to expand the entering into the society of black and other minorities in the next four years if you are elected?

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THE PRESIDENT: We have a number of good programs at the present time. We certainly will continue to enforce the Civil Rights Act that was passed when I was in Congress, which I supported. We will enforce it as to the right to vote, as to housing, as to the opportunity for minority business. We will cover the spectrum to make sure that any minority -- not just blacks but any minority -- Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, generally, blacks -- all minorities in this country ought to be treated equitably and fairly, and they will under the existing laws as they have been for the last two-plus years.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Barry Goldwater has said that he agrees with General Brown in the sense that Israel is a military burden of the United States and that we may deplete our own armor to supply Israel and we may give Israel too many arms, too much arms. Is Israel a burden in your opinion and will we deplete our own arms in giving Israel arms.

THE PRESIDENT: That is a very good question and I would like to expand a bit in my response, if I might. The United States is dedicated to the security and survival of Israel. The three million Israelis are a democratic state in an area where democracy doesn't flourish. We have many, many good firm fine ties with the people and with the Government of Israel. I want that to be understood very clearly.

Now you have to look at the broad picture when you look at the United States and Israel's military circumstances. At the time of the Yom Kippur War, the United States came immediately to the aid of Israel with substantial military hardware and military equipment. We drew down from our reserves in Western Europe, in the NATO forces, U.S. hardware that was sent to Israel. Now that was not an irreparable situation in NATO because in the interim, from 1973, we have virtually made up that draw-down but for a period of time one could say that the immediate needs of Israel in a crisis were a burden to the United States.

On the other hand, since I have been President, from August 9, 1974 to the present time, in order to make Israel strong militarily the Ford Administration has either granted or sold about \$2-1/2 billion worth of military equipment to the state of Israel. The net result is today Israel is stronger militarily than it was prior to the Yom Kippur War because of the support of the Ford Administration.

So today Israel is not a burden militarily to the United States because of the forthright action of the Ford Administration, and you have to take the comments that have been made in the proper context. Israel is a strong ally who doesn't want U.S. troops to be a participant in any future military engagement there because Israel is strong and the Ford Administration has contributed significantly to making them strong. But in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, some emergency actions had to be taken.

Now we have overcome it. Israel is strong and they are a good ally and we are dedicated to their security and survival.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been a good deal of discussion, sir, and concern that the issues discussed in the campaign have been too narrow, and you and Mr. Carter haven't discussed a broad enough range of issues, and that frankly very often during the debates you have been rattling off pre-rehearsed answers to questions regardless of the questions.

How about that large question, and would you have any particular initiative for America's troubled cities in another term.

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THE PRESIDENT: Let me speak very forthrightly. I can't speak for Mr. Carter, but we don't anticipate what those questions are going to be from members of the press. We answer them based on our knowledge or our experience. In my case, they are not pre-rehearsed, and any allegations to that effect just aren't accurate.

Now let me say this about the Ford Administration and its reference to the needs and requirements of our major metropolitan areas. The Ford Administration, with general revenue sharing, with the Community Development Act, Mass Transit Act, with the LEAA program, and a number of other programs, has given more money to major metropolitan cities, to our big cities in this country than any previous Administration. That is a fact.

Now the net result is sometimes those programs have overlapped. And so about five months ago I asked Secretary of HUD, Carla Hills, to head a Cabinet-level committee called the Committee on Urban Development and Neighborhood Revitalization, and some time, I hope -- maybe this week or next -- we will have that Cabinet committee's recommendations so we could better utilize the vast amounts of money, the billions and billions of dollars that have gone from the Federal Treasury to our cities, so that they will be better utilized, and I am looking forward to that report. I am looking forward to having it published because I am told that it has some very good recommendations of how we can better utilize what we are making available.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in addition to doing what you did in connection with the Patman inquiry in 1972, at the request of the Republican Members of the Patman Committee, were you also asked by Mr. Nixon or anyone acting for him on the White House Staff to do that?

THE PRESIDENT: As I recall my testimony, John, before one -- maybe both committees -- I said I had never been contacted by President Nixon, by Mr. Ehrlichman, by Mr. Haldeman or by Mr. Dean, and I said that I had virtually daily contact with Mr. Timmons, who was the head of the Legislative Liaison Office. But, to the best of my recollection, neither he nor anybody in his office asked me to take a hand in the Patman action or the committee action. That was my testimony in 1973; it is my testimony, or my answer to your question today.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, you stated that Governor Carter once advocated a \$15 billion cut in the defense budget. He said that is not so, that he only wants to cut \$5 billion or \$7 billion out and he wants to take it all out of waste.

I would like to know, why don't you join Governor Carter in coming out in favor of cutting that much waste out of the defense budget?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the record is clear that on two occasions Governor Carter did say -- once in Savannah, Georgia and once in Los Angeles -- and he was quoted in reputable newspapers -- that he would cut the defense budget \$15 billion.

Now, it is true, according to what he says today, that he has gone from a \$15 billion cut down to a \$5 to \$7 billion cut. I am glad to see that as he gets better educated in these matters that he understands that you can't do that to the Defense Department and be strong enough to meet the challenges of the Soviet Union or anybody else.

All right. The Ford Administration in January of this year recommended to the Congress the military budget that called for spending what we call obligational authority of about \$112.5 billion. We said that you could keep the military strong and keep the peace as we have it with that kind of a military budget, providing the Congress would take certain other actions to improve the efficiency and achieve economies in the Defense Department, and I think those proposed economies totaled about \$4 billion.

Now, the Congress, when they got all through, only approved about \$1 billion and a half to \$2 billion of those economies that the Ford Administration recommended for the Department of Defense. So, we were on record in January for some very specific economies and improved efficiencies in the Defense Department.

The net result is Congress wouldn't go along with it. They wouldn't change the laws. But, we are going to send up a budget in January for the Defense Department that will provide for the necessary funding to keep the peace, but we will also send up the kind of economy and efficiency recommendations that we made last January.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much.

How do you like the afternoon shows? (Laughter)

END (AT 2:30 P.M. EDT)