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I S S U E S   A N D   A N S W E R S

SUNDAY, AUGUST 1, 1976

GUEST:

JOHN SEARS - Campaign Manager for Ronald Reagan

INTERVIEWED BY:

Bob Clark - ISSUES AND ANSWERS Chief Correspondent

Frank Reynolds - ABC News Correspondent

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This is a rush transcript for  
the press. Any questions re-  
garding accuracy should be re-  
ferred to ISSUES AND ANSWERS

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MR. CLARK: Mr. Sears, welcome to ISSUES AND ANSWERS.

You are Ronald Reagan's chief campaign strategist and the man who reportedly picked Senator Schweiker to be his running mate, or first came up with that idea for presentation to Ronald Reagan. You have been insisting that the strategy has worked. The delegates are shifting to Reagan. Can you name any delegate, delegate or delegates from any state who, since the announcement of the Schweiker naming have shifted to Reagan?

MR. SEARS: We will be making those announcements this week and I think you will be quite interested in them. I want to say one thing. I think one of the difficulties people have had in discussing what has happened here in the naming of Mr. Schweiker is that just about everybody has thought that the announcement of Mr. Schweiker was aimed entirely at getting delegates to the National Convention.

We picked Mr. Schweiker after two months' search of everybody that we thought should be considered for the office of Vice President. We think that announcing him in advance really is the most honest way to conduct ourselves going to the Republican Convention because it gives the Republican party a chance to view a whole ticket which they are all going to have to be running with in the fall. And we think that this ticket, of course, can win in the fall because it does for the first time in over 20 years bridge

the gap that exists in the Republican party between the more conservative and the more liberal to moderate wings of the party.

There has not been an elective officeholder from a large state in the northeast on the ticket since Tom Dewey and to take advantage of the Carter-Mondale deficiencies we felt that this particular ticket was the best possible and we do feel at this point that Mr. Ford will have to come forward and name who he is going to run with and then the convention can make its choice.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Sears, you have just said that you expect Schweiker to add strength to the ticket in the Northeast. You have been quoted as saying in the last couple of days that the Schweiker choice has helped Reagan a lot in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Illinois. Can't you give us any names, any specifics at all to back up that generalization?

MR. SEARS: I think starting tomorrow we will begin to back up that allegation, but I do want to explain here that we did not pick Senator Schweiker with the expectation that the Pennsylvania delegation would fold in our midst and all come for Mr. Reagan. We certainly knew the powers that existed in Pennsylvania and that the vast majority of them would and are maintaining their alliance with Mr. Ford. That was never part of our thinking. Mr. Schweiker said, and I will swear to it myself, that when we carried through with our discussions with him, both on my part and Mr. Laxalt's, and indeed Governor Reagan, we never talked to him about delegates from Pennsylvania. That is the absolute truth. We do feel that the presentation of a ticket to the Republican party, a party that desperately needs to win this fall, is a very good idea, in the sense that by the time the convention is held now the delegates will have had three weeks to look over this ticket and decide on its viability for fall,

and already from the last week we are quite sure that Mr. Ford will have to name his runningmate before the convention, because there are a vast number of his supporters who are pretty well telling us that if he does not, they will refuse to vote for him on the first ballot.

MR. REYNOLDS: Mr. Sears, speaking of things you say you would swear to, a great many Republican supporters of Governor Reagan around the country were quite willing to swear to their beliefs that he would never name anyone philosophically incompatible in terms of stands on the issues, voting records and so forth. And I am reminded of what Governor Reagan used to say in his speeches all the time, not necessarily about selecting the vice president, but he would say: "Let us raise the banner and let us not dilute that banner for the sake of political expediency."

Well, don't you think that in doing this that is precisely what he has done?

MR. SEARS: Well, what you are really asking is a philosophical question rather than a political one. If we in this country or in the Republican party want to go on through the rest of our days with a situation where the country is constantly divided, and our own party is constantly divided, so that there is no chance for people that disagree to feel that they have somebody in the government that they can talk to



and perhaps have their views represented, then we just can't do things of the kind that we have suggested.

On the other hand, Mr. Schweiker himself has made it quite plain that he well understands and feels himself that to serve in the capacity of Vice President is really an obligation to sell the Administration's programs. Ronald Reagan has not changed one stand that he has, one opinion that he has, in any section of his speech. This is not a situation which happened really in 1960 when two high members of the party got together in an apartment in New York and wrote the platform. This is an entirely different situation, in which Mr. Schweiker will, and actively so, represent Mr. Reagan's policies to his constituencies.

Mr. Schweiker is a quite formidable candidate in that way because his constituencies happen to be those that the Republicans definitely need to crack into in the fall in order to beat Carter and Mondale.

MR. REYNOLDS: How do you go about keeping a constituency, keeping either Mr. Schweiker's constituency, when he says, as he has, that now he has a larger constituency and he will support the platform and he will endorse Governor Reagan's views, even though many of those views seem to be in direct conflict with his own, with his own votes; and how do you keep the conservative constituency, when Governor Reagan seems to turn his back on it and reach far out to the end of the party?

MR. SEARS: First of all, you can cite nothing to show Governor Reagan has turned his back on his constituency. As I say, he has not changed any of his positions.

As far as Mr. Schweiker is concerned, Governor Reagan of course has a number of things about his stand on the issues and his own personality and his own background that are of great appeal, really, to a lot of the votes that constitute Mr. Schweiker's constituency. What he has always needed is somebody who has pure credibility with those constituencies so he can get a fair hearing for his views. Now, Senator Schweiker is going to be of great value to Governor Reagan in that regard.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Sears, let me cite a direct quote to you as we talk about whether Governor Reagan has changed his position in any way on this. Just a matter of days before naming Schweiker, Reagan was asked what would happen if Ford picked a liberal Northerner as his runningmate, and he replied, according to Time magazine -- this is Time's quote: "It would be a foolish mistake. Ford would lose the South and a lot of Republicans might not work for him."

Now, doesn't that mean he changed his mind rather radically when he selected Schweiker?

MR. SEARS: I don't think so at all. That is quite true of Mr. Ford. I think Mr. Ford has a horrible problem here, and he is doing everything he can to avoid trying to answer the question.



If Mr. Ford picks somebody from the Northeast he will have difficulty in maintaining his candidacy in the South and the Far West and parts of the Middlewest. If he goes in the other direction --

MR. CLARK: Why Mr. Ford and not Mr. Reagan?

MR. SEARS: Mr. Reagan has a strong appeal, and has not to his constituency - he has an identifiable one. Mr. Ford's problem all the way through the past year and since he has held the office.

Since he has never run for it and been elected, that he has no discernable constituency. That is why an incumbent President registers down in the middle 20's in the polls at the moment.

Now, Governor Reagan by this selection now has the capability of running a truly national campaign. He can campaign strongly in the South, he can campaign with the ticket in the North, he can campaign in the Middlewest and West. Mr. Ford, whichever way he goes on this particular selection will have to give up something.

Now, Mr. Ford can sit and write letters to all the delegates. One of the networks last evening it seems has already polled all the delegates, so he could shortcut the process. They found that John Connally is preferred by more people than anybody else. I think that the American people who have had some doubts as to whether Mr. Ford can make a tough decision are not going to like this process that he is going through. I think the miscalculation here of what the mentality of the Republican delegate is is going to be very difficult for Mr. Ford to handle.

MR. CLARK: If I can get clear on one point. Are you saying it would be a mistake for President Ford to pick a northern liberal as his running mate?

MR. SEARS: I think that Mr. Ford has great difficulty in terms of figuring out who he should pick himself. First of all, we have been through the list ourselves with great particularity, so we are quite familiar with what ranges of possibility exist.

Mr. Ford's problem is that nobody in this country seems to know exactly what he stands for so he doesn't have a constituency as such that he can add to or subtract from or whatever. He represents himself to be a man sort of in the middle, but nobody seems to be quite clear from his two years in office exactly what that means. So his selection of a runningmate will add coloration of one kind or another to his candidacy and that is something that he definitely does not want to do.

Now, I think the Republican delegates, however, now that we have taken the step that we have, will demand from him that they know exactly who he is going to run with before they cast their lot with him. They have been a little disturbed and I have myself, by a few things they have heard in the last week about his plans for the fall should he gain the nomination.

First of all, I read in one of the national news magazines

that he does not intend to debate Mr. Carter if he is the nominee.

I have also read some accounts from some of his strategists that say that in regard to the vice presidency they want a very active man because Mr. Ford doesn't intend to go out and campaign very much.

Now, that is a little disheartening to a party who first of all only controls 20 percent of the vote and is going to start off by most accounts about 40 points down with Mr. Carter. So we are looking forward to the next two weeks and we do feel that really the delegates and the party and everybody else does deserve to know who Mr. Ford will be running with.

MR. REYNOLDS: But haven't you administered a blow to your campaign? You mentioned that Mr. Ford's failing lies in the fact that people don't know where he stands or what he stands for. But the basic rock on which Ronald Reagan's campaign rested, and his appeal, was his integrity. People would walk away from his speeches saying, "We know where he stands."

Do they know where he stands now?

MR. SEARS: Yes, they certainly do. I may point out to you Mr. Reagan lived in California with a Lieutenant Governor neighbor, Robert Finch, who I know quite well and you all do too, for a number of years, and it did not seem to corrupt

his stands on the issues or anything.

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As I said earlier, he has not compromised or changed any position that he has taken previously and will not, so there is really no problem about this.

What you have basically heard in the last week -- I might add also in passing, there has been a great deal of discussion about whether we have lost delegates or not. We haven't lost any delegates, not a one.

MR. REYNOLDS: The South has held.

MR. SEARS: The South has held and after all the talk all week about all this loss of delegates and so forth Mr. Ford went to Mississippi last weekend with two Congressmen fully expecting and quite well advertised that he would come home with the Mississippi Delegation and in a state that this decision has created a great deal of controversy, they still held.

(Announcements)

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MR. REYNOLDS: Mr. Sears, just before we broke for the commercial, you said that the South was holding firm and that Mississippi was a problem that you had anticipated anyway; I gather that.

MR. SEARS: I might add that a week ago today all the networks and a vast number of people from the press were all in Jackson, Mississippi, for some reason way before we did



this, feeling what was about to happen was a break for Mr. Ford in the delegation. Now we have survived this announcement; we have gone through the last week and that still hasn't happened.

So, you know, basically what you have been hearing is a lot of comment from people who are conservatives, but you must understand have been supporting Mr. Ford all the way through.

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MR. REYNOLDS: Has Clark Reid been supporting Mr. Ford all through this?

MR. SEARS: There are those in Mississippi who wonder sometimes. I don't know that we need to get into all that right now. We did feel before we even did/<sup>this</sup>there was some <sup>perhaps</sup> change of attitude/taking place in Mr. Reid's mind.

Now it is difficult, as we have had to do it all through the last year when the vast majority of the members of Congress who are Republican and the Governors and everybody else that anybody in the press would go to to get a comment have all been actively supporting Mr. Ford. So you have to understand that when you go out and ask them, even if they are known as conservatives, what they think of this, they have all been on the other side.

Now, as you get to real people who have been supporting us, yes, there has been some controversy, but they have all held through the week and we are very grateful to them for



that.

MR. REYNOLDS: Ten days ago, Mr. Sears, before the Schweiker announcement, you made the statement that the Reagan campaign had 1140 delegates and you said you knew their names.

MR. SEARS: Yes.

MR. REYNOLDS: I think we got three on that same day. Three names.

MR. REYNOLDS: Do you still have the 1140 names in your pocket?

MR. SEARS: Yes, I do and as I also explained that <sup>the</sup> same week, there are 30, 40 to 50 delegates -- 40 to 50 I believe I said -- who recognized in the press anyway as Ford leaners or Ford supporters. Because of their political situation and the ambitions perhaps that they have and the fact that they have to run for office or the fact they are looking toward securing another party position keeps them from coming out against an incumbent president.

MR. REYNOLDS: I find it difficult to believe, Mr. Sears, why they would be reluctant to come out now but they will be reluctant to at the last minute leap out of the closet and declare their allegiance to Governor Reagan.

Won't that make them even more unwelcome among the party structure?

MR. SEARS: I think that many of these people are known

to Mr. Ford's campaign people as people that are not necessarily going to vote for Mr. Ford, so I don't think there will be any delusion about that.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Sears, we obviously have a direct conflict on this number of delegates. It takes, of course, 1130 to nominate. The other Senator from Pennsylvania, Senator Hugh Scott said today -- he being a Ford supporter -- that President Ford at least had 1141. You say you have 1140. You can't both be right.

MR. SEARS: I think he did also say -- I happened to see him say this -- that he himself had only talked to seven delegates, so I guess he is taking the word of somebody else in the campaign to say that.

Obviously we will find out the answer to this interesting question perhaps during the next two weeks, but definitely at the convention itself.

MR. REYNOLDS: Will we find out tomorrow that you have more delegates than you have publicly disclosed up until now?

MR. SEARS: I think there is a very good chance you will find out tomorrow. We have more delegates --

MR. REYNOLDS: Could you give us some estimate of the numbers involved?

MR. SEARS: I think we will wait for tomorrow for that.

MR. CLARK: We want to talk with you about another

point.

First, were you the first one to suggest to Ronald Reagan that he name Senator Schweiker as his runningmate?

MR. SEARS: Well, going back even before that, I think I was the first one to suggest to him before that came up that the proper thing to do here would be to announce our choice before the convention, and well before the convention.

I want to just say a few things here. There has been a great deal of controversy as to why and how vice presidents are selected to run with presidential nominees. On the one hand, many people feel it should be left open to the convention; that four or five names should be submitted.

I think myself and Governor Reagan thinks that really that is not quite correct because, although the party has a great interest in who is on the ticket because everybody has to run with it, the nominee has to run with the fellow in question and live with him if they are elected.

On the other hand, the old system which Mr. Ford is going through a variety of, wherein you say, in other words, that you are consulting with everybody and then you pop out with a name, most of the time one which nobody really wanted --

MR. CLARK: Let me ask you about another --

MR. SEARS: Excuse me just a second -- had some great deficiencies in it too, as we have seen in '68 and '72 with Mr. McGovern and various other times. Therefore, we did feel the best way to accomplish the accommodation of the needs of candidates and the needs of the party was to come out

beforehand with our selection.

MR. CLARK: You have done that now. Let me, if I may, raise another name that popped out of your selection system: William Ruckleshaus, the former Deputy Attorney General, says he got a hard offer from you and another person to be Reagan's runningmate a little over three weeks ago. Did you indeed make such an offer to Mr. Ruckleshaus?

MR. SEARS: No, I did not, and that was printed only in one story in this particular city, and Mr. Ruckleshaus has denied the thrust of that story immediately.

MR. CLARK: Have you talked with Mr. Ruckleshaus?

MR. SEARS: I have known Mr. Ruckleshaus for many many years. I have talked to him on many occasions. I have never offered him the Vice Presidency. Ronald Reagan has never talked to Mr. Ruckleshaus about it. I never had the ability to offer --

MR. CLARK: Could I ask you if you sounded out others before approaching Senator Schweiker?

MR. SEARS: Oh, no.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Ruckleshaus was sounded out, you will agree, but he was the only one?

MR. SEARS: He was not sounded out. He of course with the third gentleman who was there and can speak to the conversation as well -- the third gentleman has been a fellow who has always been quite fond of Mr. Ruckleshaus -- I have always thought very highly of him myself, and over the



course of the years he has always thought that Mr. Ruckelshaus when various jobs or opportunities were open, should be promoted for them. And other than that, the conversations were quite private, but I will stand by the fact that no offers of the Vice Presidency --

MR. CLARK: I think the thing that has puzzled many conservatives and incensed some of them, that you moved as far as you did to Senator Schweiker, considering his being an almost liberal voting record in some eyes.

You would say now that you did not, before getting to Senator Schweiker, you did not consider a moderate --

MR. SEARS: We considered everybody --

MR. CLARK: consideration up to the point of sounding out?

MR. SEARS: No. That is absolutely true.

MR. REYNOLDS: Could I ask you, Mr. Sears, what was Ronald Reagan's first reaction when you recommended to him that he pick Richard Schweiker?

MR. SEARS: In that discussion I really took about 35 or 40 minutes. Really I gave him all the reasons in conjunction with the responsibility he had given Senator Laxalt and I to make a recommendation to him.

MR. REYNOLDS: Was he enthusiastic or shocked or stunned --

MR. SEARS: I explained how we had gone through all the people in the Senate and the Congress, and why various



of them had not met the criteria we had laid down, and how we had investigated people in the private sector, among the Democrats even, people who were in the Cabinet and have been in the Cabinet, people in the state houses, although there are only 13 of them, and why we had come to the conclusion that we had; and that took me 35 or 40 minutes, as I recall.

I then explained to him all of the good things that we thought Senator Schweiker could do in terms of bringing his constituencies to our ticket. And after that, of course, I had been doing all the talking for all that time, his first response, as I recall, was "Well, will he do it?"

MR. REYNOLDS: And did he accept right away when you asked him?

MR. SEARS: Well, as any normal man would do, he was rather floored by being asked when he was. We did make it plain to him that we were not putting him on a list or anything, that he was indeed the only one under consideration; until we reached some resolution of whether he would do it or not, then we weren't talking to anybody else.

He asked to have really 24 hours to think about it, which he took, and came back.

MR. CLARK: Mr. Sears, another very disturbing thought to some conservatives I think you would agree is the thought that Richard Schweiker, with that extremely liberal voting

record in Congress- might wind up as President. How can you possibly offer anyone reassurances on this score, or would you want to offer reassurances?

MR. SEARS: Senator Schweiker himself has said if his ticket is elected he would assume, and I think that would be anyone's assumption, that he would run on the policies enunciated by Governor Reagan. And if the worse should happen, he would pursue those policies.

I don't see anything so confounding about that. I do recall in 1960 in some quarters there was a lot of criticism of John Kennedy for picking Lyndon Johnson. A lot of the criticism really revolved around the fact of would Mr. Johnson pursue Mr. Kennedy's policies. Well, of course unfortunately we got a chance to see whether that was true, and of course Mr. Johnson --

MR. CLARK: That was a great surprise and dealt with an assassinated President.

I wanted to finish this thought. Can you really say to a conservative, can you make a pledge to conservatives in this country that if Richard Schweiker became President he would carry out the Reagan mandate, if there were such a mandate?

MR. SEARS: I don't see any problem with that, myself. One of our problems in this country is that first of all people will often, and this is one thing I admire greatly

about Mr. Schweiker, are unwilling to give their word about anything and have it meaningful, and very secondly to that, the level of peoples' belief about anything in this country is probably at an all-time low. I think it would be very refreshing if we could go ahead with this exercise, that Senator Schweiker would become Vice President, that we could all see once again that those who are part of his constituency would feel that they have a chance to have their opinions felt, and Governor Reagan could make the decisions, as Mr. Schweiker says he will be able to.

MR. REYNOLDS: Mr. Sears, if this firestorm continues, is the Schweiker nomination, or designation, negotiable?

MR. SEARS: Oh, absolutely not.

MR. REYNOLDS: He is on there to stay?

MR. SEARS: Yes, indeed.

MR. CLARK: I am sorry, we are now out of time. Thank you very much for being with us on ISSUES AND ANSWERS.

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