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Office of the Vice President
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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
WETA - TV TAPING
THE ROBERT McNEIL REPORT
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

(AT 11:30 P.M. EST)

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, what did you find on your travels makes foreign leaders most anxious about the United States at the moment?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Robert, I tell you, the thing that they want to be sure, are we going to stay with them, is the United States going to be solid in commitment to the defense of freedom and the support of those basic values of human dignity and individual opportunity, equality, that we have always stood for. My answer is yes.

QUESTION: What kind of reassurances were you able to give them on that score?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I thought the best way to do it, very frankly, was just describe what we had been through as a Nation, national trauma that the people of the United States have been through, the Vietnam war tore us apart internally, then the Watergate, then the increase in oil prices, world prices, the resulting inflation, recession, unemployment, and the problems that have flowed from that which have caused us a great deal of internal difficulty, the concern of Congress of why hadn't it done more to prevent these things, and then their wanting to become involved to assert themselves and entering into the international field, and the difficulty of 500-and-some people trying to make foreign policy.

But as we just sat in friendly conversations with the heads of government, and in most countries I sat down with the cabinets.

QUESTION: The fact that they raised the point means, doesn't it, that some of them at least have some doubts on this score?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, that's right, no question.

QUESTION: In which areas of the world, in particular in the Far East more than Europe?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, I think this is general. I started out in North Africa and went to France, and from there to Iran, and to Southeast Asia, and then Australia and New Zealand. And it was pretty much the same.

QUESTION: How would you characterize the doubts?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, just uncertainty, really, as a basic question between the Executive department of the Government, the President, the Secretary of State, their

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position, and whether the Congress is going to support it or whether they are going to come in with separate action, and what the impact is going to be and which way the country is going in the election.

QUESTION: Yes. Which way do they want it to go?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: They just want this country to stand for what it has always stood for. They seek belief in human dignity and freedom and liberty, opportunity. They just want to work together with us, that is all. They just feel if we are all standing together we are going to be able to preserve those values, and I think they are right.

QUESTION: Do they find, for example, to use one specific, do they find credibility in the warnings we have been giving to Cuba and the Soviet Union against further military adventures like the Angolan adventure? Do they find that credible, those warnings?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, this is what they want to hear. This is exactly what they are afraid of. They visualize, and they are deeply concerned about Soviet imperialism, which is sort of a combination of czarist tradition along with Marxism, international Marxism, and they want to know whether the United States is going to stand by and watch the Soviets now use some of its, well, new form of colonialism, and the troops of some of its satellites.

QUESTION: What Dr. Kissinger calls surrogates?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is a good word.

QUESTION: Can I ask the question again, they want to hear this sort of thing but do they find the warnings credible, given the differences between Congress and the Executive, do they find it credible that we could actually back up such warnings?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, what they want to be sure is, first, that this is what we feel, and, secondly, that we have got the will as a Nation and a people to back them. And I think that this country is moving strongly back to a responsible position where we have been through this trauma, and this I explained to them. We are in the middle of an election, but I think the country is moving, coming together and that we are joining as a Nation and with a determination and a resolve to defend the basic values at home and abroad that we have lived by, that have brought us to the tremendous opportunities which we have enjoyed and that have held us, frankly, in my opinion, together through a Constitutional crisis which perhaps no other country in history has ever gone through and come out the other side with the strength and determination which, I think, we are coming out with.

QUESTION: Do you yourself feel, Mr. Vice President, that we need as a Nation to do something concrete to restore our credibility other than rhetoric? Do we need to do something physical?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: What do you have in mind?

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QUESTION: I wondered what you have in mind.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I didn't ask the question.

I think that just what I told you, that this country is going to stay with the world, that we are not going to withdraw. They are worried about are we going back to a new form of isolationism.

You see, let's put it this way: They saw the Soviet Union, having organized the Communist Party in Angola. And then coming in with military equipment to one of these operations they call wars of liberation, and then sending in, what, 10,000, whatever it was, Cuban soldiers supported by Communist equipment, Communist funds. And they just think, well, if it is going to happen there it might happen to us and where does it end? If it isn't Cuban soldiers it is going to be North Vietnamese soldiers.

QUESTION: Would you rate this anxiety at an intensity or a pitch greater than anything you have experienced in recent times among our allies?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I haven't been involved --

QUESTION: Are they really worried, I guess is --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: They certainly are.

QUESTION: They really are?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, yes. I was in Tunisia, and you have got the same thing now starting in connection with the Sahara. Castro was down in Algeria; General Giap was there from North Vietnam. There is a tremendous amount of Soviet equipment coming in, and it looks as though maybe you have got the same thing starting again.

QUESTION: Foreign policy has become quite a hot issue in the campaign while you have been on your travels. Do you feel, having clearly read yourself in on it, that the debate is being properly focused?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I will tell you, if you are in a very complicated situation, which we are in the world, it is very hard to make a political issue out of a complicated situation because by the time you have explained the situation, therefore, you have a very great difficulty, particularly if you are not too familiar with, as some of the candidates are not, coming to any specific suggestions or conclusions.

Okay, that being the case, it is a lot simpler to attack a person, an individual, and make an issue out of an individual. And I think that is really what is happening.

QUESTION: I see.

You said in your National Press Club remarks back in February that we are not having an informed debate on the grave issues that face present-day America.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think that is right, and I

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just said it again.

QUESTION: What grave issues do you mean, particularly, or did you mean?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: All right, I think one of them is foreign policy; one of them is national defense. And they are really part of the same, the whole question of international economic, social progress. I know that our good friend, Lee Kuan Yew, who is Prime Minister of Singapore, he was part of the Malaysian States, Malaysia as a nation, and then they dissolved the structure as it was, and he found himself with a nation on its own, two and a half to three million people, really. It is almost a city state because it is on an island.

And they had a standard of living of about \$300, or gross national product of about 300 per person. He decided the only way to preserve their independence and to stop Communist infiltration, penetration and subversion was to raise the standard of living of its people through economic growth and social progress. And so he went about creating in Singapore conditions that would attract multinational corporations.

He succeeded. He has now got the third highest standard of living in any country in Asia. He has got a standard of living which runs around \$2,000 gross national product per person. It is an absolutely phenomenal result.

Now, this is what he believes: He wants to be sure is the United States going to stay in Southeast Asia, are we going to keep a fleet there in Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean, that will at least balance Soviet development.

QUESTION: Were you able to tell him you were serious?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, I was, because I had just taken the President's speech which he made in Hawaii, and I told him the President had committed himself to that program, and the Congress is supporting the budget which he has requested for defense effort, and I think this country realizes if we are going to preserve our freedom at home we have got to do it in other areas of the world by supporting our friends.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, the individual you mentioned a while ago, of course, is Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Did these various foreign leaders you visited ask about Kissinger's future and his problems back home?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir.

QUESTION: They didn't?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, they are great admirers of his.

QUESTION: No, but I mean weren't they concerned about the problems he was having back in the States?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, sir.

QUESTION: They didn't even ask about them?

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: No.

QUESTION: This recent business with --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: They were interested in where our country was going to be. They were interested primarily in what it would mean, the actions by Congress, when the President had taken a position, and then Congress took action --

QUESTION: But they didn't tie Kissinger into stability and foreign affairs?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Now that you have asked it, I don't think there was one person who raised his name as such in that relationship.

QUESTION: You know, this recent business with Rogers Morton and Melvin Laird, Admiral Zumwalt, and others suggesting that --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I wouldn't bunch them, they are each in a different category.

QUESTION: Right, right. But let's put it -- let me see --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You have to go one at a time, though, on those three, because each -- one is running for office, one --

QUESTION: That is Admiral Zumwalt?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That is Admiral Zumwalt.

One is a campaign manager for the President, and the other one is a very experienced politician in town.

QUESTION: But let me try an umbrella and see if you can take it. They all come under the general category of the Secretary of State leaving the cabinet for one reason or another, all right?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, I don't agree. Bruce Morton made a statement to a small group of extreme right citizens in California, thinking it was a private meeting, and made a statement which if you are a politician, and like I am, it is the kind of a statement that if you think you are speaking to a small group and not going to be repeated, you might make a statement and exaggerate it. And I think that is what happened there.

As far as Zumwalt is concerned, he is basing his whole campaign against --

QUESTION: The Secretary of State?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes. So that is a totally different thing. He is trying to get elected.

QUESTION: Okay, my question is this: It has been suggested that all of this has been written in print, that the boys at the White House are trying to do a Rockefeller job

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on Kissinger, referring of course to what Bo Callaway reportedly did to you. Does it smell like that to you?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think it is a little different, to tell you the truth. Bo Callaway wanted to get the President nominated, and so do I. And he said, coming from a certain area of the country, the South, and the Republicans in the South, as you know, are dominated by the right wing of the Party, or at least that is the predominant element there. I don't think they represent the majority, and, as I said, it is a minority of a minority. But I didn't want to get into a fight with them and, therefore, from my point of view I am interested in seeing the President get nominated.

I think he is a man of tremendous integrity, tremendous ability, great dedication to this country, and with a determination to represent the best interests of the country. I didn't want to get into a fight with a minority of a minority that would in any way jeopardize that nomination.

QUESTION: Isn't exactly what is happening now with Kissinger?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, but it is really different. Kissinger is a man who has a tremendous standing in this country. The last poll, which was the Harris Poll --

QUESTION: Unlike Nelson Rockefeller?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, listen, we are in totally different positions. I am here as Vice President. I have no responsibilities or functions except to preside over the Senate of the United States, Constitutional responsibility. Otherwise, I am here to be a staff assistant to the President.

The Secretary of State is responsible to carry out for the President, under his direction, foreign policy. Now, he has been a tremendously successful person.

Foreign policy, I am confident, was the basis for Nixon's reelection by that tremendous majority. Now, those who are opposing the President in the Republican Party, headed by Reagan, are the right-wing side of the Party. They want to beat the President. Therefore, they want to go after his strongest point in order to beat him, and his strongest point is foreign policy and the Secretary of State. So they want to knock him out.

Those in the Democratic Party who want to beat the President, they have got to attack him at his strongest point, which is foreign policy. It has always been the Republican Party's strongest point. So that they are out to get him.

So you have got, really, the left and right extremes in both cases out to get him. I don't blame them. This is politics. It is dangerous for the country in terms of our national interests. That is why these people are worried.

QUESTION: Have the Reagan people gone too far in their criticisms of the President and Secretary of State?

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I saw an ad that they ran in the papers in Wisconsin, put in by the Florida Reagan people, talking about his buying the White House. I don't know what they were referring to, but I think they are getting down, they are getting desperate and, therefore, it is getting very rough and no holds barred. But this is American politics and if you can't take the heat, you have got to get out of the kitchen.

QUESTION: Do you think the Party is going to be able to come together after the nominating process?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: It's not going to be '64 again, you don't think?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, I really don't think so. No, this is not really '64 at all. There you had an eastern progressive element of the Republican Party and a California, which is really a split party in California, but the conservative element in the Party. And so I am thinking, in primaries I am thinking, but I think there was more an ideological difference then than there is now.

I don't really think today ideology has any relation to our problems. I think it used to. People still use it. They talk about liberal and conservative. I think myself it is totally meaningless in terms of solving problems today, that really what you have to do is say let's get the facts, not don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is already made up, which is what some people are still doing. But that is not the way one is going to ever really meet the problems in a very rapidly changing period in the world, which is what we are living in.

QUESTION: You are an old hand at national politics. What do you make of the Jimmy Carter phenomenon as it is called?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think it is very exciting. It is an extraordinary development. You remember, Scotty Reston had a piece maybe a month or two ago, that the American people wanted a change, and a lot of old faces had been around and they are looking for the man. And I think what is happening fits right into the pattern of the article he wrote. It was very good on this subject.

QUESTION: President Ford said, you know, the other day that he still felt that Hubert Humphrey was going to be his opponent in November. Do you agree with the President?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think it depends upon how successful Carter is. If he really gets almost all the delegates he needs, then it won't happen. If he isn't assured of enough of them, then I think it will happen.

QUESTION: You mentioned the desire of the American people for a change. The code expression now is anti-Washington. Does this surprise you?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. I held hearings for the

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President all over this country, six hearings anywhere from 700 to a thousand people with witnesses, with members of the Cabinet, on domestic policy, domestic programs, getting their reactions, governors, mayors, businessmen, labor leaders, welfare recipients, everybody, heads of Indian nations, and so forth. Almost universally their feeling is, and one could sort of summarize it, in the old days they used to look to Washington for the solution of their problems, and now they are beginning to feel Washington was their problem.

It is bureaucratic red tape, and whether it is the welfare recipient and all of the questions and forms they have to answer, or whether it is the businessman, or whether it is the governor or the mayor, they all have the same problem.

QUESTION: Did they convince you that they were right? Do you think Washington is the problem?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I have to tell you that I think Washington is a tremendously important part of our country, and the government here is extremely effective and doing a great deal, and that it is a great government. But there is no question it has become very complicated, and we keep passing. And I think if you look back over the past 15 years, we have overpromised as a Nation. And I have been part of it as a governor, and we have underdelivered. People are cynical, they are frustrated.

The Government has passed one program after another, and now 1,007 categorical grants of aid to State and local government and local groups. Well, each time the Congress passes laws, then those laws have to be carried out, and then here have to be administrative procedures, and then they are constantly changing them.

Governor Dan Evans of Washington, who is one of the ablest governors, he was head of the Governors' Conference, he testified before us, told about how they worked for three months in preparing for an application under Federal grant for \$7 million. And when they got it all done, and they spent a tremendous amount of time and effort on this, they got word back from Washington, "Sorry, since you made the application we have changed the regulations, therefore, you have got to redo them."

Then he told another story about a million and a half of savings, and he sent that in. And they said, "Sorry, there is no provision for savings in our regulations." So he said, "Just give us less money, less regulations, and get off our back."

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, we are all being frequently reminded through films and now books on Mr. Nixon, of the issue of presidential character, and a lot of people have been saying since the Nixon years that presidential character should be an issue in elections, we should scrutinize that as voters much more carefully than in the past. How should the voters go about scrutinizing the character of presidential candidates, and what essential qualities should they be looking for, do you think?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I am only a Vice President,

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but talk about scrutiny, I got pretty well scrutinized, 500 FBI agents working for three months here and abroad, and months of hearings.

QUESTION: But that was because you were appointed, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I understand that. But you are talking about scrutiny, and I can't help but recall that.

Now, I wouldn't recommend this for the average candidate because I am not sure how often we would be able to get anyone to run for office. But I understand what you are saying, and I think character is the essence of leadership, integrity, vision. The Bible says without vision, ye shall perish. Courage, administrative ability, the capacity to understand how a political system works, and in a democracy unless the people understand the issues, they will not support effective action. Therefore, communication with the public is essential.

These are the kind of qualities, to me, that are essential for effective leadership, whether as President, or governor, or mayor, or whatever the elected office is.

QUESTION: You know, some of your friends have been saying, Mr. Vice President, that you have been treated rather shabbily by some folks at the White House who have less experience and less everything. Do you feel that you have been treated shabbily?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Absolutely not. No, sir. Listen, I have known every Vice President since Henry Wallace, and that goes back quite a ways. And he used to come out and play tennis out at the house at 7:00 o'clock in the morning with us, and I was then Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and then Assistant Secretary of State. And I have known all of the Vice Presidents. Most of them were frustrated.

So I came down here with total recognition of the fact there was -- and I made a study for President Eisenhower. I was head of his Committee on Government Organization, and he asked us to make a study because he wanted to find out what he could give Mr. Nixon to do. So I knew there was nothing, and we told him there was nothing except presiding over the Senate. Beyond that there isn't.

Therefore, I was totally aware of it. I will help the President any way I can, but I am not going to get in his way.

QUESTION: Are you saying, then, that the job isn't much, but you knew it when you came into it?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The job is as much as the President wants to make of it. Presiding over the Senate, don't minimize it, it is a very important job and a great honor.

QUESTION: How much has the President made of it in your case?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: He has been extraordinary, to tell you the truth. He has asked me to take one commission after another, carry out one responsibility for him after another, and also given me total freedom to speak. This is unusual.

I remember being down at a Governors' Conference in Miami when Lyndon Johnson came down to speak. He was an old friend of mine. I went up to see him in his room and the poor guy had been handed a speech, didn't believe a word that was in it; had to read it to us. He was sore, he was frustrated.

And as far as I am concerned, the President asks me to make a speech somewhere, and the first time I went, the press said well, now, do they give you a speech, and I said no. Did he say what he wanted you to say, and I said no. Well; they said, what did he say, and I said he just asked me to go and make a speech for him. And so he has given me total freedom. And I am making a series of speeches on issues.

I asked him about it beforehand, and said I didn't want to do anything to cross him up on any of, you know, his political areas. He said, "Look, I think discussing freedom of expression is essential in this country. Therefore, say what you feel, only let me have a copy after you have made it because I would like to read it," which he has done. You can't ask for more.

QUESTION: Just in conclusion, Mr. Vice President, talking about President Nixon, what do you think the legacy of the total effect of the Nixon presidency is likely to be on the Republican Party when it comes to the actual election this year?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I really don't think it is going to be very much one way or the other, to tell you the honest truth. I think that is an era, first, in which a great deal was accomplished, particularly in the international field. I think he was brilliant in that field. And then this tragedy of Watergate, this followed right after Vietnam. I just think that this is now behind us, and that President Ford is the man. He is dealing with the issues. He is the one who is before the country as responsible leader, and is now challenged both in his party and on the other side.

And I think the focus is on him. I don't think the focus is on President Nixon or either the great achievements or the tragedies of that era.

QUESTION: Even Mr. Reagan a couple of times has mentioned the fact that Mr. Ford was Mr. Nixon's choice. And one can expect, I suppose, that the Democrats won't ignore that when it comes to the campaign. Do you think that Mr. Ford has no political vulnerability on that score?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, because if you remember, the Congress under the Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution, which they adopted and which was ratified, has to act on a recommendation by the President. Mr. Nixon was President; there was a vacancy; he recommended Mr. Ford, and that was after consultation with the Congress, so that

the Congress has approved, and the Congress is two-thirds Democrat.

And that is true in my case. So neither the President or myself could be here if it hadn't been for action by the Congress after careful scrutiny. So we are there not just by the nomination of the President, but also by confirmation by the Congress, and the Congress being Democrat and the President having been Republican, so we got a double endorsement, you might say.

QUESTION: Mr. Vice President, thank you very much.

Thanks, Jim.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: My pleasure.

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(AT 12:00 A.M. EST)