

August 19, 1976

Pool Report -- Visit to President's Suite

We spent a lot of time in a holding room and we weren't actually taken into the working study until the beginning of the roll call vote. The President was seated immediately in front of a bank of three televisions. He was listening to Chancellor, to NBC. He was in shirt sleeves, without a tie on and pinstripe pants. He was smoking his pipe. He had a little coffee table next to him on which was a small elephant, we were told, made out of banana leaves, if I heard it correctly.

Then, there was a microphone wired up into the banana leaf elephant. They were shooting campaign film, and it was to pick up the President's remarks as he made remarks. Seated around him on a couch immediately to the left were Jack Marsh, Bob Teeter, Stu Spencer -- Teeter is the pollster for the President Ford Committee -- and Cheney was on his immediate right. I will go around the room counterclockwise. Marsh, Teeter, Spencer, later Nessen came in and sat down next to Spencer, then the President sitting in the middle on a chair and to his right were Cheney and Bryce Harlow.

All were in shirt sleeves except Cheney and Harlow. They had coats on.

The President had an open briefcase at his feet. I couldn't tell what was in the briefcase, but it was filled with notebooks and briefing papers and that kind of thing.

He was working from a Xeroxed tallysheet and for the first 20 minutes or so of the roll call vote he sat rather impassively with a yellow pencil occasionally ticking off States, but not all of them by any means.

We didn't get in at the beginning of the roll call. We came in in just about the D's. The first quote from the President that I got was when Louisiana -- there was an abortive attempt to get Louisiana to poll all of the delegates. The President turned to Marsh and said, "Did this surprise you, Jack?" He said, "What did they do, try to withdraw that count?" Marsh said, "Yes."

The next quote was, 'he' saw his son Steva on the screen with a cowboy hat and he turned from the screen and said, "That is quite a cowboy hat Steve has on."

Then, when it came time for Minnesota to vote and Anchor Nelson stood up to announce the vote, the President said, "Anchor Nelson, he is a great guy." Then, Mississippi came up and the vote was announced, 14 Reagan, 16 Ford. Bryce Harlow leaned over and said, "That represents just a little bit of endeavor," and everybody laughed. Then, Tom Curtis, of Missouri, stood up and the President said, "Tom has almost lost his voice."

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There were numerous football jokes, as you recall, from the chairman of the delegations, Nebraska, and the President laughed at all of them. Just before that, the Montana guy stood up and mentioned his State was the last of the big-time spenders and the President said, "He has to pronounce that pretty carefully."

At the New Jersey count, the President said, "That is two better," and then for New York, when the camera was on Rosenbaum, he said, "Look at old Rosie." In New York, Richardson got one vote and Stu Spencer commented, "Richardson is killing us."

New York was the State that put him ahead and, as it was called, Harlow said, "Here it comes," and then it was the President who said, "Look at old Rosie," and then somebody referred to him as the Chancellor, the Iron Chancellor. Then Spencer made the line about Richardson killing them.

In New York City the still photographers and the TV crew came into the suite. When New York was called, Harlow said, "Here it comes," indicating New York was going to put him ahead. At that point the President said, "Look at old Rosie," when he came on the screen. I think it was Marsh who referred to him as the Iron Chancellor, just dropped it in, and then they listened to the vote count in New York and that is when Spencer said, "Richardson is killing us."

When the Pennsylvania count was announced at 93 for Ford, he said, "Drew Lewis said that two months ago, he sure did." Then he turned to Marsh and said, "He did a great job," speaking of Lewis.

In Nebraska there was the first reference to the football thing about number one, they said they were number one in football games and the President laughed at that and then Oklahoma came up and the fellow said, "Nebraska knows we are number one in football." The President laughed and then Oklahoma cast its vote unanimously for Reagan and Harlow said, "At least you are right on the football."

The President said something about, "They might change that. They didn't last fall." Texas, when it called itself a humble State, the President laughed. When the member of the Virginia delegation called for a poll, the President turned to Marsh and said, "Whose side is he on?" Marsh replied, "He is against us and it is probably because of this sprinkle thing."

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There was a lot of joking back and forth from the time we got into the room about a delegate named Eliza Sprinkle and Stu Spencer, or somebody, said, "Well, Eliza Sprinkle is finally going to vote in public." She is an 80-year-old delegate from the NiNth District of Virginia. She had been the last uncommitted hold-out in Virginia. She is the oldest delegate at the Convention. She finally stood up and when they called her name, she just said, "Governor Reagan."

There was a lady in the Virginia delegation, Virginia Lampe, if you were listening, who said she had to fight her way through the press to get to the microphone and indignantly walked up and cast her vote for President Ford, and he said, "Thata girl, Virginia," and laughed.

Also during the Virginia polling the President put down his tally sheet, stood up and stretched and walked around over to his desk to get some pipe tobacco. For most of the way through the polling he didn't make any attempt to log in the votes. He just set his tally sheet aside.

There was also one Virginia delegate who stood up and said he got no free meal from the White House. Therefore, he was voting for Governor Reagan. The President put his head back and laughed when the fellow said that. There was also a Virginia delegate named Marsh and when his name was announced and he announced his vote for Reagan, Ford shook his finger at Marsh and Marsh said he was the wrong one and said, "They would have to poll this delegation," speaking of Virginia.

At one point a delegate, whose name escapes me, got up and voted for Ford and the President said, "Atta boy, Paul." It was a phrase he used more than one time. That was Paul Johnson and a middle name.

When it got to West Virginia, Ford laughed when Arch Moore got up and it became apparent that that was the vote that was going to put him over, and then when Moore said, "Twenty votes for Ford," There was applause by the staff members. Kennerly was snapping pictures of Ford, asked him to turn around so he could catch him smiling, and get the flashing "Ford Wins" in the background. Ford said nothing.

He remained seated, he smiled and remained smiling while Kennerly snapped the pictures. The next quote I have is, "I have to watch my wife getting through all these kisses."

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Then he turned back around to the TV screen and the photographers were standing behind him and they kept trying to get him to turn around and he said, "I have to see my wife getting all these kisses." He turned back around and Sonny Bono was apparently laying one on Betty about that time and he turned around and said, "Is that Sonny Bono?"

Then the President said, "I hope nobody demands a recount." Let me throw in one thing here, Dr. Lukash was in the room from the beginning, but he was sitting over at a conference table at the far end having a snack or something. It wasn't until West Virginia came up that he wandered over and joined the President to watch him go over the top.

Don Penny and a lot of people were shaking hands and one thing and another after he went over the top. Penny came in and shook hands and Ford said, "Well, I guess we don't have to change the speech." We got a look at the tally sheet he was working with during the thing; the total he was working against was 1179.

After several minutes, when they were taking pictures, the President did shake hands, stood and shook hands around the room with his aides that were there. The quote I got when he turned to Spencer, he said, "Stu, it has been long and tough. It was great." He also said, "Poor Wisconsin and Wyoming," referring to the two States who just missed out putting him over the top.

His own tally by the way, was 1179, the sheet he was working from. He smiled and very definitively reached over and ticked off West Virginia on his tally sheet.

Dick Cheney said there would be two briefings Thursday and Friday. On Thursday, Ed Schmultz of the Counsel's Office, and perhaps one or two others, would give a step-by-step briefing on the Vice Presidential selection. The briefing will be at mid-afternoon. On Friday, Stu Spencer will brief in the campaign before the President's party leaves for Vail.

-- Rudy Abrahamson, L. A. Times  
John Mashek, U.S. News & World  
Report  
Strobe Talbott, Time  
Tom DeFrank, Newsweek  
Charles Gibson, ABC