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FIRST LADY'S PRESS CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 4, 1974

Location: State Dining Room

1 FIRST LADY: It's nice to see so many good friends
2 here. I am sure you all know that this is my first experience
3 at giving a press conference, but I feel I know you all so well
4 that I thought it would be a very comfortable way to do it,
5 and a way that we could all get together at one time and not
6 take up individual's time.

7 May I have the first question?

8 Helen?

9 QUESTION: Your son Jack says that you were very
10 disturbed when you heard that your husband would probably run
11 for the Presidency. Are you disturbed? How are you liking it?

12 FIRST LADY: No, I was very surprised at my son's
13 statement.

14 QUESTION: You want him to run again or how do you
15 feel about that?

16 FIRST LADY: Well, I feel at this point two years
17 is quite a long ways away and I wouldn't want to commit myself
18 one way or the other.

19 QUESTION: You sound doubtful.

20 FIRST LADY: No.

21 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, could I ask you how much
22 influence do you and family have on the President when he is
23 speaking about matters, for instance, the amnesty? Do the
24 boys tell him what they think he should do?

25 FIRST LADY: Oh, the whole family has a discussion

1 on many of these questions. Not only amnesty, but questions
2 such as the policy in Vietnam, and so forth. Perhaps, if you
3 recall, our son Michael had an entirely different feeling
4 about the Vietnam situation. So, we always enjoy a family
5 conference, always have, over the dinner table.

6 QUESTION: What was the division of the family when
7 the President discussed amnesty with the family this last time
8 before he made his speech?

9 FIRST LADY: Well, it was rather a deep discussion,
10 I would say. And points were made on all sides, and I think
11 that the President was open to consideration, and I think
12 perhaps he was leaning in that direction.

13 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, in that connection I am
14 wondering if you have not considered what women's role would
15 be in trying to stop future wars?

16 FIRST LADY: Well, they can always, I could say,
17 enlist and make sure.

18 (Laughter.)

19 But I think that by becoming very active in politics,
20 which I deeply encourage, that they will play a great role in
21 the future of our country. My husband occasionally makes the
22 remark when I discuss equal rights, equal opportunity -- not
23 that he is for it -- and has made his position quite clear.
24 We kid about it and I often say, "Well, I can remember well
25 there was a time when we couldn't even vote."

1 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, in that connection, with Lady
2 Bird Johnson it was beautification, Mrs. Nixon chose volunteerism.
3 Have you decided on a specific area to direct your attention?

4 FIRST LADY: I think I more or less decided quite
5 specifically when Mr. Ford was Vice President, that my interests
6 lay in the field of arts and working perhaps with Nancy Hanks
7 in the Endowment of the Arts, because that is my background.
8 And also I am very interested in children, the underprivileged,
9 and retarded children.

10 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, since Time quotes you as saying
11 you expect to be a very active and public person, I have a
12 two-part question:

13 The first one is -- Senator Buckley has proposed
14 a Constitutional Amendment that will prohibit abortion for any
15 reason while Governor Rockefeller has strongly supported
16 abortion law liberalization. Are your own convictions on this
17 subject closer to Governor Rockefeller's or Senator Buckley?

18 FIRST LADY: Definitely closer to Governor Rockefeller.

19 QUESTION: Thank you.

20 The second question -- Will you accept National
21 Newspaper's Syndicate's offer to be the first First Lady
22 columnist since Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt?

23 FIRST LADY: Thank you very much, but, no.

24 (Laughter.)

25 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, in the light of a woman's role,

1 certainly in your role as a housewife in the past in dealing
2 with the price of children's shoes, and everything else has
3 become so expensive, since your children have discussed the
4 issues that concern them with your husband, will you discuss
5 inflation with him at all, and do you have any positive ideas
6 on how he can cope with it?

7 FIRST LADY: Well, I have positive ideas by having
8 to cut back on the budget, just as anyone else has with the
9 income smaller and because of the increased rate in prices. I
10 think we all have to tighten our belts a bit, and do without
11 a few things that we were used to doing with.

12 QUESTION: What do you mean by "tighten our belts?"

13 FIRST LADY: By that I mean cut down on our spending.
14 You have to have a certain balance of budget if you are a
15 housewife, and keep a checkbook. At least my checkbook has to
16 balance.

17 (Laughter.)

18 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, you have indicated that you
19 encourage women to be active in politics. Will you be active
20 politically beyond what you do for the arts. Do you see your-
21 self, perhaps, in going out and helping campaign for various
22 people running for Congress?

23 FIRST LADY: I will not take a political, active
24 part in politics, as far as issues are concerned. I have
25 campaigned before, and I have campaigned for my husband,

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1 I have campaigned for the Governor, I have campaigned for the
2 President, so this is nothing new for me. I imagine I will
3 also be doing it again.

4 QUESTION: Did you take any part in pushing for
5 the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in States that
6 haven't passed it yet since your husband is so strongly in
7 favor of it?

8 FIRST LADY: Yes, I would definitely be happy to
9 take a part in that.

10 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, will you campaign in 1976
11 and for whom?

12 FIRST LADY: That's a very leading question and I
13 will be happy to campaign in '76, and guess who?

14 (Laughter.)

15 QUESTION: Could I ask you since you did sign --
16 as the President called it, he signed his pledge in blood --
17 this has something to do with Helen Thomas' question and you
18 said you relieved him of that promise when he became the
19 "instant" President but what changed to make you relieve him of
20 that promise as far as '76 is concerned? Will you run
21 happily with him in '76?

22 FIRST LADY: It depends on the state of the country.

23 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford?

24 FIRST LADY: Yes?

25 QUESTION: In light of your comments about tightening

1 your belt, can you send any specific recommendation down to
2 the White House kitchen about ways to cut back?

3 FIRST LADY: You mean to my husband?

4 (Laughter.)

5 QUESTION: On ways to cut back in official enter-
6 taining or family meals?

7 FIRST LADY: Well, I think we all have gone through
8 that and I think that at least in our family we have certainly
9 had to make that adjustment, as everyone else has realized
10 with the situation a lack of funds as far as the rise in
11 prices and there is only one solution.

12 QUESTION: On the ways the food budget can be cut
13 back or have you had ---

14 FIRST LADY: Yes, we don't eat as much steak as
15 they would like to have or roast beef or some of those things
16 that the boys like.

17 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, this is probably early-on
18 to say, but have you found life as the First Lady more or less
19 frustrating than the Second.

20 FIRST LADY: Well, I found it a very busy life but
21 I expected it to be very busy. And I really looked forward
22 to the challenge. I am very happy. Everyone has been so
23 generous and warm and tried to help me in all manner of ways
24 whether it was trying to get settled here in the House or
25 trying to get settled as far as correspondence is concerned.

1 The whole thing has run very smoothly.

2 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, you said that you would like
3 to be active in the field of the arts and also helpin under-
4 privileged and retarded children. Would you^{be} a bit more
5 specific about the kinds of things you plan to do in these
6 three areas?

7 FIRST LADY: Well I have always been active in the
8 field of the arts since that is more or less my profession
9 as I started at the age of eight and that was in dancing
10 schools and continued on until long after I was married.
11 And I was always exposed, of course, to the symphonies at
12 home. And I feel that this is something that -- I would
13 like to see the arts brought back into the schools. I feel
14 that this^{is} part of our cultural education and if we are to
15 remain a great nation we need this.

16 QUESTION: On children?

17 FIRST LADY: The retarded children question? Yes.
18 Well I am very interested in children, of course, all children.
19 But I am specifically interested in those that are under-
20 privileged and retarded.

21 QUESTION: Is it possible from the statement last
22 week where you said you were upset about the statement that you
23 were different from other public figures in Washington; what
24 do you think he meant by that?

25 FIRST LADY: I'm afraid you'd have to ask him.

1 I always thought I was quite normal.

2 (Laughter.)

3 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, as to the Bicentennial
4 coming during your tenure in the White House, do you have any
5 special thoughts about special things you would like to do
6 in that very special period?

7 FIRST LADY: I am working on that now and I have
8 now come to the conclusion -- I haven't had the time. We
9 really have been here a very short time. In fact, we are not
10 completely moved and I really would not ^{like} to specifically say
11 what particular project.

12 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, because the President was in
13 the Navy and he will be invited to visit the Navy, Marines or
14 Coast Guard, the widows of officers or those at home would
15 you plan to go and visit -- they are here in the Washington
16 area ---

17 FIRST LADY: Yes, I know they are. I am very familiar
18 with this. And I think it is a very fine, fine tradition.
19 I would hope that my schedule would allow me to go.

20 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, last Wednesday the President
21 said that you had given him your time for a press conference
22 and that now he would not only have to get breakfast but lunch
23 and dinner.

24 (Laughter.)

25 Has he been getting breakfast, lunch and dinner?

1 (Laughter.)

2 FIRST LADY: I am afraid he has become accustomed
3 to the very good service we have in the upstairs family dining
4 room and he finds it quite convenient. So, I can't promise
5 you that he is getting his own breakfast.

6 QUESTION: Do you have any plans to go around the
7 country and become acquainted or to know better the people
8 than perhaps the opportunity of their coming here? In
9 other words -- I put that very badly.

10 FIRST LADY: Oh, I would certainly hope to. I
11 hope to travel as much as I can with my husband.

12 QUESTION: Do you have any specific trips in mind?

13 FIRST LADY: None at the moment, no, but I
14 definitely hope to get around as much as possible.

15 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, could I ask what would be
16 your preference for a winter White House or a summer White
17 House? Would you want to go back to Vail or is that too
18 far away or ---

19 FIRST LADY: Vail, of course, naturally is our
20 home in the Christmas, New Year's period.

21 QUESTION: Is it possible to get back and forth
22 easily?

23 FIRST LADY: Yes, I think it is quite easy. My
24 husband has made trips back and forth during our trips out
25 there.

1 QUESTION: Turn it into a summer White House and
2 then stay for the winter? It will be a winter White House?

3 FIRST LADY: Winter and summer.

4 (Laughter.)

5 QUESTION: What part will Susan play?

6 FIRST LADY: Susan will be going to school and I
7 am sure she will be helping me a lot with the children because
8 she already has had the experience of working with those
9 underprivileged and retarded children.

10 QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

11 FIRST LADY: Would you repeat that, please?

12 QUESTION: What is your opinion, what do I think of
13 the job of Mrs. Maria de la Peron, first woman president in
14 America?

15 VOICES: Argentina.

16 FIRST LADY: Well, not having been or having the
17 privilege of visiting down there, I would not have the
18 possibility -- I couldn't possibly comment on that.

19 QUESTION: Have you had much chance to travel abroad
20 and do you look forward to visiting other countries?

21 FIRST LADY: I have traveled abroad quite a bit.
22 We have been in many countries. We have been in Europe. We
23 have been in Russia. We have been in China and many of the
24 Far Eastern countries.

25 QUESTION: Will you be going to Japan with your
husband?

1 FIRST LADY: I would certainly hope so.

2 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, your husband has talked with
3 former President Nixon since the Nixons left the White House.
4 Have you talked with Mrs. Nixon?

5 FIRST LADY: Unfortunately, I haven't had a chance
6 to talk with Pat. We have corresponded. And Julie -- I
7 just received a nice note from Julie just today.

8 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, what about the rooms in the
9 White House, or certain spots in the White House; what are
10 your favorites?

11 FIRST LADY: I think the White House is a really,
12 truly beautiful spot and it is very hard to pick out a favorite
13 room. I would say that perhaps the Blue Room is one of the
14 prettiest and that is one of the reasons we have used it for
15 entertaining.

16 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, whether you are here for two
17 years or six, what sort of a "footprint" would you like to
18 leave at the White House? How would you like to be remembered
19 or what?

20 FIRST LADY: Well, I would like to be remembered
21 in a very kind way; also as a constructive wife of a President.
22 I do not expect to come anywhere near living up to those First
23 Ladies who have gone before me. They have all done a great
24 job, and I admire them a great deal and it is only my ambition
25 to come close to them.

1 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, people look to you as an
2 extremely normal woman, the country looks at the family and looks
3 at the reports on how you say your husband is starting to enjoy
4 the service upstairs -- you are not in a normal situation here
5 with cameras, et cetera.

6 Do you have any strategy for maintaining that
7 normality over the next few years?

8 FIRST LADY: I see no reason why we cannot maintain
9 that normal family relationship just as we have. In fact, I
10 was completely dumbfounded the way the children adjusted. I
11 was afraid it would be more of an adjustment to them than it
12 would be for Mr. Ford and for me. They were just perfectly
13 happy. We have had servants at home so it isn't as if we
14 were not used to having help.

15 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, regarding the performing
16 arts, you came out in the press yesterday saying you are greatly
17 in favor of expanding the performing arts in the schools
18 throughout the country. Can you elaborate on press that was
19 in the Post yesterday?

20 FIRST LADY: This is something that I think would
21 probably have to be a program that -- I don't know if it can
22 be funded federally or not. I will have to look into that
23 situation. It maybe a program that those children that are
24 interested in art -- it will be available to them. This is
25 something, a technicality that has to be.

1 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, can you tell us what Julie
2 was writing about to you today? You said you had just gotten
3 a note from her.

4 FIRST LADY: Well, we correspond regularly, my
5 husband, Julie, and we are all good friends.

6 QUESTION: Anything specific?

7 FIRST LADY: No, she was just thanking me for a
8 phone call that she missed, and I talked to David.

9 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, how frequently do you have
10 on having meetings like this with the press?

11 FIRST LADY: As often as I think that the press
12 has anything to ask of interest.

13 (Laughter.)

14 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, will you look into the question
15 of cancer research as soon as you can with the President to
16 see if we can't expedite that program?

17 FIRST LADY: I'll be glad to. Only too happy.

18 QUESTION: Are you keeping a diary or some sort of
19 record that might ---

20 FIRST LADY: Bonnie, I hoped you were keeping it
21 for me.

22 (Laughter.)

23 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, with your interest in the
24 dance, and you met the other day for several hours with Nancy
25 Hanks ---

1 FIRST LADY: That is true.

2 QUESTION: The National Ballet, is there any chance
3 of that coming back or is that down the drain?

4 FIRST LADY: Well, I would hope that the National
5 Ballet certainly would be able to come back. I think this is
6 a financial situation and I think that in order to have good
7 artists here, to have good ballet, we have to have the
8 finances and somehow that has to be arranged. We have to do
9 it without taking all the cream off the top, mixing up or
10 homogenizing the thing.

11 QUESTION: But do you see any future for it coming
12 back right now?

13 FIRST LADY: Yes, I do.

14 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, are you a swimmer and how
15 soon do you think there will be a swimming pool in the White
16 House?

17 FIRST LADY: Well, if it takes as long as it took
18 to build our swimming pool, it will be at least a year. I
19 hope there will be one sometime. And, yes, I am a swimmer.

20 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, who are your favorite
21 Presidents, former, late Presidents and First Ladies?

22 FIRST LADY: I am sorry, I decline to answer that
23 because I have no favorites and for many reasons. I think
24 each had their own individualistic characteristics, and I
25 really would not want to specify.

1 QUESTION: Why keep President _____
2 (inaudible) there when President Roosevelt's used to be there?

3 FIRST LADY: I suppose that is true.

4 (Laughter.)

5 QUESTION: Since you are the hostess, the location
6 of the swimming pool -- there is some speculation that the
7 swimming pool may go into the kennel, or maybe the press
8 will go into the kennel.

9 (Laughter.)

10 Where do you think the pool should go?

11 FIRST LADY: Well, I wouldn't want the press to
12 go into the kennel. That would be last thing in the world.

13 (Laughter.)

14 And I wouldn't want the kennel, either, to go. I
15 think perhaps if there is such a thing as a swimming pool,
16 and I say "if", they can find a spot that won't disturb the
17 press or the dogs.

18 (Laughter.)

19 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, when President Ford told
20 Nelson Rockefeller that he wanted him for Vice President --
21 does this mean that you are often brought in on major decisions
22 and were you consulted and were there any other such decisions
23 where you played a part?

24 FIRST LADY: I wasn't consulted the moment of the
25 telephone call, and certainly knew nothing about the fact of

1 the Vice Presidency. That came as a ---

2 QUESTION: Mrs. Ford, many First Ladies in the
3 past have restricted themselves to American designers. I know
4 that you have an extensive wardrobe. Will you include the
5 European designers or will you stick strictly to the American
6 designers?

7 FIRST LADY: I am/sure I will be with American
8 designers.

9 QUESTION: American designers.

10 Mrs. Ford, may I ask if you will get another Sugar?

11 FIRST LADY: The Golden Retriever?

12 QUESTION: You have had two Golden Retrievers.

13 FIRST LADY: Yes, we have had two Golden Retrievers.

14 QUESTION: Do you think you might get another one?

15 FIRST LADY: I would doubt it at the moment. I
16 have my hands full right now without ---

17 Thank you.

18 FIRST LADY: Thank you, so much.

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