

The original documents are located in Box 21, folder “2/76 McCall's "How much should a first lady say"” of the Betty Ford Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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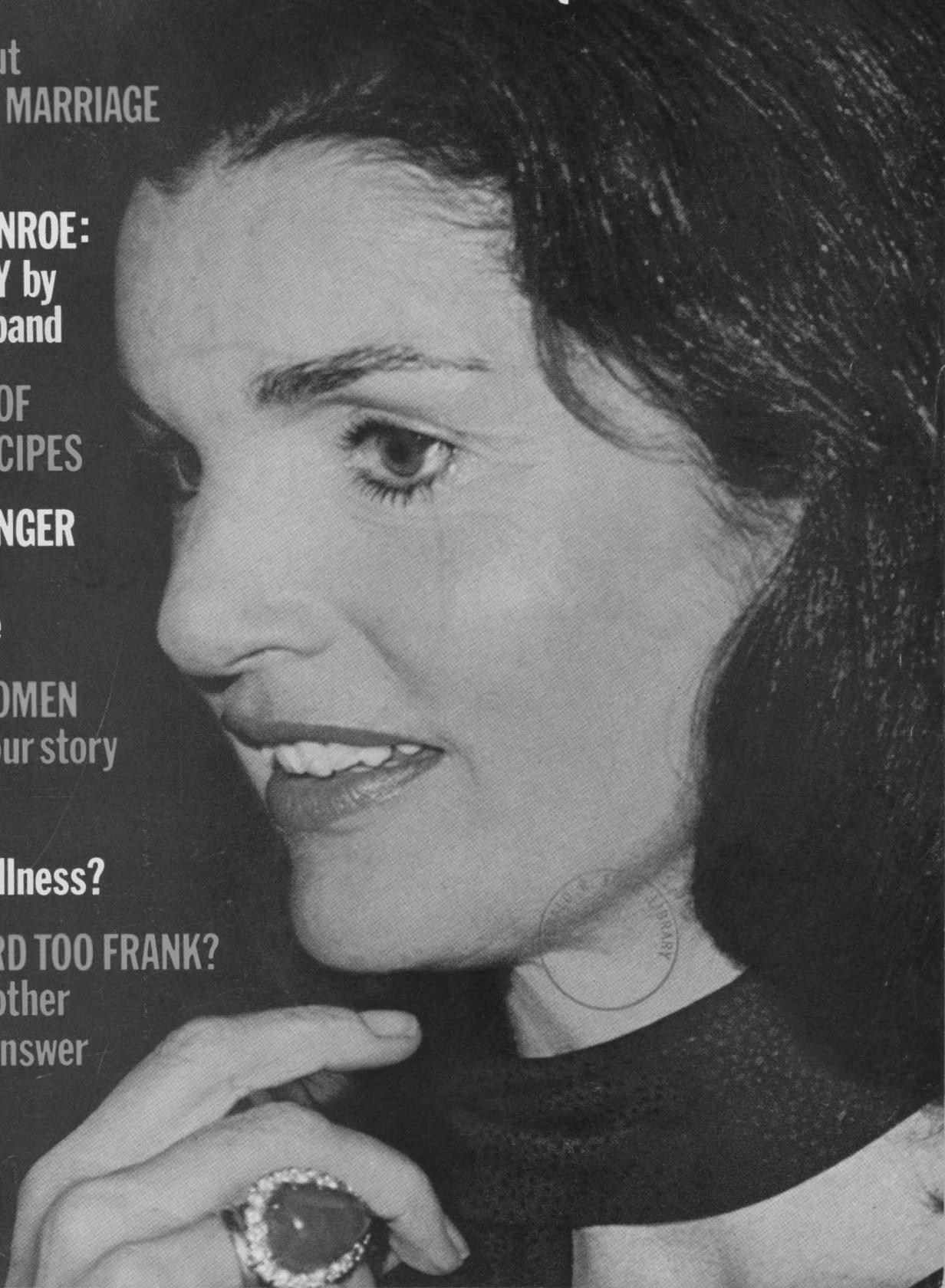
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FEBRUARY 1976

With certain unforgettable exceptions—Eleanor Roosevelt was one—the wives of Presidents have never said much, especially on sensitive subjects. Then the warm, voluble and unintimidated Mrs. Gerald Ford let candor and plain talk out of the closet. She spoke her mind on some of the most significant social issues confronting women and their families, from the ERA to abortion, marijuana and premarital sex.

Betty Ford enthusiastically supports the Equal Rights Amendment; said she was glad to see abortion brought "out of the backwoods and put in the hospitals where it belongs"; speculated that her own children had probably sampled marijuana ("It's the type of thing young people have to experience, like your first beer or your first cigarette") and confessed that she "wouldn't be surprised" if her 18-year-old daughter, Susan, were to have an affair.

Because these comments, and others like them, caused such controversy around the country, we decided to ask the wives of some of the men who are, or might become, Presidential candidates to comment on Mrs. Ford's outspokenness and tell us how they feel about the same issues. We approached the wives of Birch Bayh, Lloyd Bentsen, Jimmy Carter, Frank Church, John Connally, Fred Harris, Hubert Humphrey, Henry Jackson, Edward Kennedy, Edmund Muskie, Ronald Reagan, Terry Sanford, Milton Shapp, Sargent Shriver, Morris Udall and George Wallace. We received a mixed bag

of responses. Jane Muskie and Margaret Sanford expressed admiration of Betty Ford but did not wish to comment on the positions she has taken. "I respect her right to express her own opinions," Mrs. Muskie said. "But each First Lady must decide for herself... how she

HOW MUCH SHOULD A FIRST LADY SAY?



will deal with controversial issues and the difficult personal questions she may be asked." Margaret Sanford declared, "I would not think it relevant or becoming to debate her..." But, she added, "the awesome issues facing the Presidency and the American people...

should be debated by the candidates who seek to serve the nation. It is a damaging diversion to involve the views of wives on relatively secondary matters."

Nancy Reagan did not agree that issues like abortion and teenage sexuality were relatively secondary

sticker, "If it feels good, do it," may sound fine, but what if it makes someone feel good to go around bopping his neighbors over the head with a club?"

"I have always been a very private person," Beryl Bentsen answered. "I really believe personal relationships should be dealt with within the family and in the greatest of confidence." After expressing this implied disagreement with Betty Ford, Mrs. Bentsen noted that "I am a supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment."

Only Ella Udall and Helen Jackson talked directly and at length on the issues McCALL's raised. They were both in agreement with Betty Ford about the ERA. "I'm with her one hundred percent!" said Mrs. Udall. Mrs. Jackson said, "At first I was concerned that the women's liberation movement might breed disdain for the career of homemaking, which I think is a noble calling. But as it has matured, the movement has become less shrill and more constructive. I share Scoop's support of ERA."

"If we don't have legalized abortion, we're going to have back-alley abortion. It's far more dangerous... and far more expensive," Mrs. Udall declared. Mrs. Jackson said, "Scoop has strong feelings against abortion... But I feel a woman must have the right to make decisions on a matter that so profoundly affects her own body and life."

On marijuana, they both took cautious stands. "I'd like to see more conclusive proof on the actual danger or harmlessness of long-time

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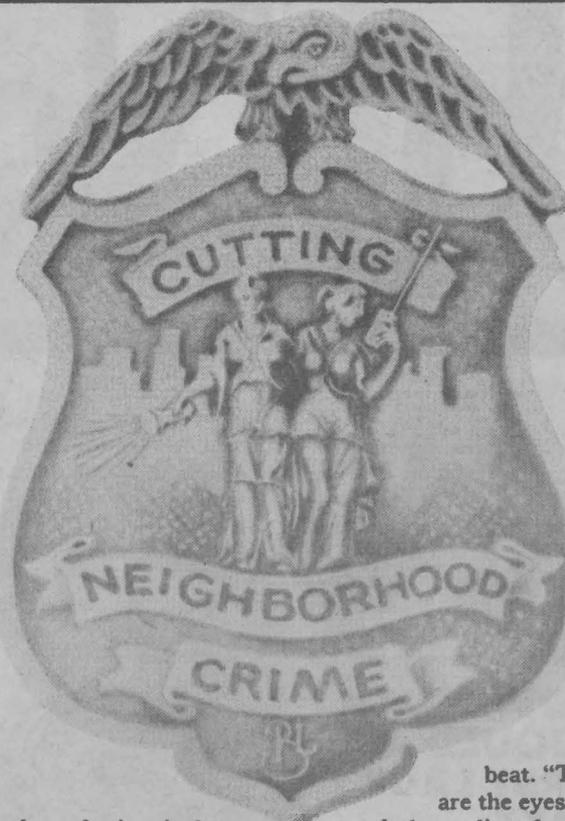
use," said Mrs. Udall. "I worry about the negative medical evidence indicating the detrimental effects of marijuana on genetic development. I am against it," emphasized Mrs. Jackson.

On premarital sex, Mrs. Udall deplored the double standard. "Everybody's zeroing in on the young woman. What about the young man? Would it be scandalous for Susan Ford to have an affair? If so, what about Jack Ford?" However, Mrs. Jackson was unequivocal. "I do not believe in premarital sexual relationships," she declared. "I am hopeful that by the time our children are grown they will have developed a set of moral and ethical values that recognizes the sanctity of the marriage relationship."

The other political wives were considerably less talkative—when they talked at all. Nellie Connally said she was not sure she qualified as a potential First Lady, "but regardless of that question, I regret that I must decline." Muriel Humphrey disqualified herself, feeling certain that her husband would not run. Cornelia Wallace, renowned for her honesty and shrewdness, also refused to comment: "I appreciate your asking me but my schedule is so full I am not accepting any more commitments. I hope you understand."

Marvella Bayh allowed that "each person has to draw their own line between what is personal and what is private. Who is to know how they would respond in a given situation?" Drawing the line, she turned down the chance to air her opinions.

LaDonna Harris was on the campaign trail. So was Rosalynn Carter. So was Bethine Church. Joan Kennedy was indisposed. Our deadline came and went. Deputies of several other wives were still leaving telephone messages every now and then, politely promising to call back in a couple of days. Has Betty Ford heralded a new era of frankness for First Ladies? Well... that remains to be seen. —NATALIE GITTELSON



The fear of crime is down in the Asylum Hill area of Hartford, Connecticut, where residents had grown so afraid from reports of muggings and robberies that some quite literally wouldn't leave their apartments. Now they're taking turns patrolling the streets for a few hours each night, watching for any signs of trouble. These "street observers" walk in twos and threes, carrying walkie-talkies. If they see anything suspicious, they can instantly tell a neighbor who in turn calls the police. The response time is under a minute. As a result, more people are back on the streets, and what was once a terrified community is getting back to normal.

This is just one example of the many neighborhood crime-prevention programs that have been started around the country. They're made up of volunteers working with police, and their aim is not so much to catch criminals as to keep them from committing crimes in the first place. The volunteers don't carry guns. Essentially they perform some of the nonenforcement functions of the old-fashioned cop on the

beat. "They are the eyes and ears of the police department," says Detective Al Diaco, crime-prevention specialist with the New York City Police Department in charge of the Civilian Patrol in Laurelton, a residential area of Queens.

The 500 to 600 people who make up that subdivision's 18 patrols cruise the streets of the neighborhood in their own cars—each equipped with a citizen-band radio and a flashing blue light. They drive from three to four hours a night, as often as five nights a week. If there's some trouble—a fight or potential burglary, for example—the patrol will call the precinct, where a central radio receiver from the neighborhood group is located. If the situation is less serious, they will call a neighbor who has a radio, and he will call the precinct. The program was started with \$50 from the community and \$450 from the city.

While muggers were the biggest problem in Laurelton, several incidents of child molestation caused residents of Virginia Beach, Virginia, to form the Tidewater Council of Block Mothers. When a block mother is on duty, she

puts a sign in her window that identifies the house for a child in trouble. "It's an emergency haven for children," said Cissie Crabtree, president of the group. "A child knows he can go there if he needs to." The children learn about the program at school.

Once a neighborhood crime problem starts, the fear it generates tends to compound it, law-enforcement officials say. People stay off the streets, making the neighborhood all the more vulnerable to criminals. In Hartford many of the old people—mostly elderly women—who were simply too frightened to step outside, are the same ones who now patrol the streets. The police also hold a community meeting every other week to discuss crime problems in the area and what can be done to solve them. But, says police lieutenant Neil Sullivan, "the major accomplishment has been a sense of neighborhood security, a sense of care."

In Dayton, Ohio, volunteer neighborhood-assistance officers not only patrol residential streets; they also absorb some of the other nonenforcement duties that overburden the police force, such as traffic control and paper work. The 115 volunteers receive 105 hours of training at the local police academy. They work on foot and in their own cars; their uniforms, radios and gasoline are all paid for by a federal grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Each volunteer is required to put in 16 hours of service a month, but the majority work about twice as long as they're asked.

Not all neighborhood anti-crime programs are that fancy. In other communities, they may consist of nothing more than citizens armed with whistles to blow in unison to call attention to a crime in progress, or a simple system whereby a housewife calls her neighbors on either side to keep a watchful eye out when she plans to be away from home for any length of time.

—KATHERINE PRITCHARD