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AUGUST 21, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF

CHARLES B. RANGEL
CONGRESSMAN FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK
RONALD V. DELLUMS
CONGRESSMAN FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
AND
CHARLES C. DIGGS
CONGRESSMAN FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

THE BRIEFING ROOM

11:25 A.M. EDT

MR. HUSHEN: Ladies and gentlemen, we have Representative Charles Rangel of New York and Stan Scott, Assistant to the President, here to brief following the Black Caucus meeting with the President.

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Thank you for your patience. All of the Members of the Congressional Black Caucus are very pleased in terms of the priority that the President made in his agenda in order to contact us in connection with some of the priorities that we face in this Nation.

We leave with full confidence that the President will have someone appointed who would provide us with access to the President before major decisions are made that would affect the quality of life of the poor people in this country.

To that extent, the President has advised the caucus collectively and individually that not only is his door open to us to discuss these major problems, but more importantly, that each one of us could call and only if he was out of the country or was engaged in some meeting that in any event he would be certain to return that call to find out what our concerns were.

As you know, the meeting was scheduled to last longer, but the President was forced to go to receive a body of one of our slain Ambassadors, and we fully appreciate the time that he has given us.

I think the most important thing that has come out of this meeting is that he recognizes that our concerns are his concerns. We left a paper with him that deals into short- and long-term programs that we are suggesting and recommending and asking for input, and we concern ourselves in exchange with the problems of inflation, the effect that it has on poor people, the unemployment problems, the housing

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problems, and we are hoping that with the pledge that was made to the American people that the black, the minorities and the poor of this country would be included. To that extent, we are pleased with our very first meeting.

I think I should add that the President did say that he intends for his Cabinet and this Administration to reflect the presence of all of the people in this great Nation of ours.

If you have any questions for any of the individual Members in the time allotted, which Stan, I guess, would be in the best position to govern, we will be glad to attempt to answer them.

Q Did the President specifically say he was going to name a black to his Cabinet, and did you ask that he do so?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: We did not come in with a specific shopping list. The President volunteered that at every level of Government we should expect to see people of our racial persuasion that have the talents to offer.

Q Did you discuss the question of full employment, Congressman Hawkins' legislation in the House?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: There is no question about it, and the President made it very clear he is considering some type of public service employment.

Q Mr. Rangel, prior to this meeting, there was considerable concern expressed by Members of the Black Caucus over the President's first speech emphasizing his push for economy and that the defense budget was inviolate and that the cuts would have to come in some other areas.

Did you get to that, and did you come to grips with this and did you clarify that with him that that wasn't the view of the majority of the Members and that there could not be domestic cuts in such serious areas affecting urban problem?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: That was the major thrust of our concern. I think it is safe to say Congressman Ron Dellums has addressed himself directly to this point, that while he has a concern for the defense budget that he did not consider it sacrosanct.

Q Did Ford say that?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Yes.

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Q I believe you voted against the confirmation of Mr. Ford when he was reported to the committee as a Vice Presidential nominee, and there was a good deal of talk at those hearings about his record on civil rights and social legislation and so forth. Based on this meeting now, have you changed your mind about that?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Yes, since that time I have had the opportunity to review the Congressional records of Lyndon Johnson and Harry Truman and John Kennedy and felt that now that we are dealing with a President of the United States for all of the people, that he has an excellent opportunity to be such a President, and we are here to deal with the four C's and cooperate with that effort.

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Q How do you feel about the nomination of Mr. Rockefeller as Vice President?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I would like to take that up with you in New York. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. Rangel, since the President is appointing someone for the caucus to have access to, vis-a-vis his office, will the caucus be formulating a program aimed specifically at the Executive Office?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: We already have left papers that deal with those specific subjects of our legislative concern. We are prepared to enlarge, compromise and conciliate with the feeling that the White House may have about our legislative priorities and so it is not a question of us having to do our homework. We have done it and we are prepared to sit down and discuss it.

Q You say you haven't come with a shopping list but what are these papers? Are you listing your legislative goals or what? Could you tell us what they are?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: We concerned ourselves with housing and minority economic developments, the inclusion of Africa in a meaningful way in our foreign policy, full employment, and certainly consideration of the House-passed bill to extend OEO in some form of fighting poverty, the National Voting Rights Act as well as postcard voting registration in the District of Columbia, the ever-increasing health problems that the poor are attempting to deal with, the domestic and international drug problem that we face in the inner cities and indeed throughout the Nation, re-examination of the military budget and taxing system, a re-examination of the educational delivery programs, improving the status of all minorities including women, transportation problems in connection with our recently passed and reduced in terms of priority mass transportation bill, mass transportation, reestablishment of revenue sharing based on need rather than region, concern for amnesty and a general overall review of the economic policies.

These are the papers that were left with the President. I would just like to reiterate that our concern and our exchange dealt primarily with those economic problems and inflationary problems that the President spoke with the Congress about and we dealt specifically with them today with a follow-through to be expected in the very near future.

Q You said the President said one of his prime considerations would be a public service jobs program.

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CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I hope that I didn't say that, because that would not be the impression that I want to leave with you. He is considering some form of public service employment.

Q Did you get his impression on the proposal of waiting until the overall unemployment rate is over six percent?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: No, let me say this: We met with a former Member of Congress that happens to be President of the United States. Most of our concern was establishing that vehicle for follow-through on specifics.

Q Did he name someone specifically to act as liaison and report back to you?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I guess we left with the impression that we had been working with our old and dear friend Stanley Scott. It was not our intention to select personnel, but we made it very clear that the type of person we are talking about has to be someone who has access to the President when we need him. And we hope that Stan Scott will have that type of access.

Q You quote the President as saying that he doesn't consider the defense budget to be sacrosanct. Could you elaborate on that?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I cannot because he did not.

Ron, would you like to deal with that and see whether any expansion could be made in an accurate manner?

CONGRESSMAN DELLUMS: Just briefly, one of the points that we made was that we agreed that we must address ourselves to the issue of inflation and that we viewed with concern the statements that the President made that one of his efforts toward dealing with inflation would be restraint on Federal funds and that if he saw the defense budget as sacrosanct it would mean that we would be back in the same ball game we have been in and that would be cuts in important human domestic programs.

He indicated in the few months that we had remaining that he would assure myself and other Members of the Black Caucus that he did not perceive of the defense budget as sacrosanct.

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He stated that as all of us knew, he felt very strongly about a very strong defense and that in his role as a member of the appropriations subcommittee dealing with this subject, he had also played that particular role, but he realized if there were to be cuts they would have to be within the framework that what would have to happen is those cuts would not in any way affect the defense posture, that they would have to be taken within the framework of nuclear as well as non nuclear weapons systems, and that the overall approach would be to guarantee that there would be no weakening in our defense position. But his final statement was, "I can assure you that the defense budget is not sacrosanct."

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CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Could I say this: I have been informed by the White House personnel that there will be an opportunity for the reporters to talk with individual Members and certainly we do have the time, and if you could tell me, Stan, where that place is, perhaps it might be better for you to operate in that manner.

Q Congressman, one final question. Richard Nixon was also a Congressman who happened to become the President. What was the difference in your reception today?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Richard Nixon was elected and obviously made some pre-election commitments to people who had a difference in philosophy with the aspirations of the type of districts that we represent.

As tragic that it is that we can find a President and Vice President that have not been elected by the people, we believe, too, that they have not made and do not have to make prior commitments and do not have political impediments. They can do what is right, what is decent and we are here to cooperate in that effort.

Q Did you get a commitment for, (a) a black Cabinet Member and (b) any special legislation?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: No, we did not specifically deal with that.

Q Did Rhodesian chrome imports come up?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Yes, it did. Congressman Diggs handled that.

CONGRESSMAN DIGGS: He reiterated the statement made by Mr. terHorst yesterday that he has a different view with respect to the repeal of the Byrd amendment, and he welcomed the announcement that I made that we have postponed that matter until after the recess, which will give him extra opportunity to implement the remarks that were made by Mr. terHorst yesterday.

Q Mr. Rangel, did he make any specific promises on any of your requests?

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I would say the most important promise is that we will be getting together almost immediately to start dealing with specific legislation, and I think in order to be more specific that caucus Members would like to meet with you individually, and we would be following Mr. Scott.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 11:39 A.M. EDT)