

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

KENNETH SMITH

AND

GERALDINE SUMTER

NATIONAL STUDENT LEADERS OF THE
MAJOR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA

THE BRIEFING ROOM

6:00 P.M. EDT

MR. HUSHEN: Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, the President met this afternoon with the national student leaders of major youth organizations in the country. The meeting lasted longer than scheduled, almost an hour and a half.

We have with us here today Ken Smith from Dagsboro, Delaware. Ken is 25 years old. He was very instrumental in setting up this meeting with the President and is a close friend of Jack Ford.

We also have Geraldine Sumter, representing the 4-H Clubs. Geraldine is from Gadsden, South Carolina. Geraldine is 18.

They are here to explain to you about the meeting. I thought I would have Ken come on first and give you a brief description of what took place and how Ken came to take part, and then you can ask them your questions.

Q Before you start, do you have an affiliation with any of the groups?

MR. SMITH: Yes; I am with the Distributive Education Clubs of America, DECA. It is one of the vocational students' organizations. I am Director of Special Projects for that.

I guess really the way the meeting came to pass is about a month and a half ago I got a chance to meet with then Vice President Ford and bring up to him some ideas that Jack Ford and I had discussed, as well as many other young people, about the need and interest of young people getting involved in Government, getting involved in the political parties, opportunity to find ways and means for the Government and young people to get together.

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It is an old story, but it is one that I don't think we have really found the answers to just yet.

I also pointed out the fact that the Administration had supported the 18-year-old vote and that the interest and support coming behind there was something we should build on.

As a result of that and in the course of events, I became president and I guess about a week or week and a half ago, he indicated his interest in meeting with a group of young people -- their elected officers, the ones the young people selected themselves to represent them.

So that is how this meeting came about. There was about 21 of us in there representing some 30 million young people across the country. It is the first meeting of this kind in the White House, that I am aware of anyway. It was a very interesting meeting because when he came in he went around and shook hands with everyone, and talked with them and opened up by discussing his concern and interest in involving young people.

And from there, each of the members who were sitting around the table had a chance to talk with him and mention subjects on their minds. They ranged the whole gamut. They ranged from vocational education and training to the trade bill, the juvenile delinquency bill, the minority involvement in Government, the environment, euthanasia. A whole lot of things.

Each of them the President responded to and talked about. The thing that came through most strongly though and the one point the President picked up on in particular was the idea of having a permanent group of young people to advise him and the Federal Government, and perhaps have a full-scale conference in the immediate future in which these representatives of the youth organizations would get together and review ways and means of involving young people in the political parties to review the problems of education and elsewhere, and come up with some specific suggestions that could be made to the President, the Administration, the political parties, and so on.

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And the emphasis there was on career education, on participation in Government, how do we get into the Government, how do we get into the political parties -- those kind of things, as well as voluntarism and all of them associated with the Bicentennial.

So he indicated his interest in seeing that kind of a conference happen and some kind of permanent advisory group.

I don't know quite what the procedure will be or how that will come to pass, but I think it is clear from what he said that it will happen that way.

Geraldine, do you have some comments you want to make?

MISS SUMTER: Yes, I would like to say on behalf of all those young people there that we were more than impressed. You know, it just shook us that the President would, indeed, meet with young people from across the country.

Some of us may say, you know, it is good public relations but then it was more than that, because we did get a chance to really talk with the President, shake hands with the President and not just sit up in a ceremonial affair. But we thought we were going through a meaningful process.

I was most impressed with the fact that the President was interested in, as Kenneth said, establishing some kind of permanent institution for us to go through.

And he hit a lot of my interest. I have heard a lot about the President through the news media and all, and he has come through as the person as the cameras projected him to be. We were delighted in seeing that he is, indeed, an honest person and that impressed us.

MR. SMITH: I guess we will try to answer your questions if you have anything you would like to ask us.

Q You said, Miss Sumter, he hit a lot of your interests. What are your interests?

MISS SUMTER: I represent 5.5 million 4-H'rs from across the country and, when I sat down and related some of those 4-H projects, and whatever, to him, he was receptive. Just because I am a 4-H nation team member, it doesn't mean I am not interested in career education and juvenile delinquency and things of that nature, and government.

And the President expressed concern in our areas. He saw the need for young people to get involved with government, he even related a story of his son being in a carpenter's apprentice program for five summers, or whatever.

Those things interest me and I was glad to see that the President has some grass roots, so to speak.

Q Was there any discussion of the young people present about the President's amnesty proposals and what was there reaction?

MISS SUMTER: Yes, I think one or two people came flat out and told the President we appreciated him coming out and hitting the issue right, and not sneaking and hiding, and making those indiscreet statements like politicians can do.

MR. SMITH: Several of the students around the table did emphasize the fact of how much they appreciated the President's obvious sincerity and honesty and the fact that he does come out and say what he thinks and I guess I have already said several times they felt that they could trust him. I guess that was the overriding comment.

Q Did they specifically draw a contrast to any of his predecessors in that regard?

MR. SMITH: No, I guess there was one contrast about honesty to other politicians.

MISS SUMTER: It was also mentioned and it was more or less a statement of appreciation that the President has showed that he is a Christian man, a Christian person. His family, you know, is a church-going family.

Q In your discussions with the other youth people, whether in the meeting, before or after, did you get a feel for what generally their political affiliations are? Were you mostly Republicans or Democrats, or some of each?

MISS SUMTER: It didn't come up.

Q What are you?

MR. SMITH: I am a Republican.

MISS SUMTER: I haven't declared a political party.

MR. HUSHEN: Thank you.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much.

END (AT 6:05 P.M. EDT)