

487

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 13

of the

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

7:31 P.M. EDT  
May 6, 1975  
Tuesday

In Room 450  
In the Old Executive  
Office Building  
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Will you please sit down.  
Good evening.

Miss Thomas?

QUESTION: What are the lessons of Vietnam in terms of the Presidency, the Congress and the American people in terms of secret diplomacy and fighting a land war in Asia, and also, would you welcome a Congressional inquiry into how we got in and how we got out of Vietnam?

THE PRESIDENT: Miss Thomas, the war in Vietnam is over. It was sad and tragic in many respects. I think it would be unfortunate for us to rehash allegations as to individuals that might be to blame or Administrations that might be at fault.

It seems to me that it is over. We ought to look ahead, and I think a Congressional inquiry at this time would only be divisive and not helpful.

QUESTION: Mr. President, may I ask you, then, don't you think we can learn from the past?

THE PRESIDENT: Miss Thomas, I think the lessons of the past in Vietnam have already been learned, learned by Presidents, learned by Congress, learned by the American people, and we should have our focus on the future. As far as I am concerned, that is where we will concentrate.

Miss Lewine?

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, your forthcoming meetings with Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, do they represent the beginning of a new American-led negotiation in the Middle East toward a peace settlement?

THE PRESIDENT: They do not represent a new negotiating process. I am meeting with President Sadat and Prime Minister Rabin for the purpose of getting from them any recommendations they might have as to how we can maintain the peace in the Middle East, how we can come to some final settlement that will be beneficial to all of the parties.

We are in the process of reassessing our Middle East policy, and they can make a very valuable contribution with their on-the-spot recommendations.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you now see any hopeful signs that there is any movement there off dead center?

THE PRESIDENT: I am always optimistic. I believe that the leaders of all of the countries, both Arab and Israeli, as well as others, recognize the seriousness of any new military engagement in the Middle East and the ramifications that might come from it.

So, I am optimistic that as we try to move ahead aimed at avoiding a stalemate, avoiding stagnation, that we can work with other countries in order to ensure the peace and a settlement that will be satisfactory to all parties.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have been reported as being damned mad about the adverse reaction of the American people to the Vietnamese refugees. I would like to ask you how do you explain that reaction? What in your judgment is the cause of that?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Lisagor, I am primarily very upset, because the United States has had a long tradition of opening its doors to immigrants from all countries. We are a country built by immigrants from all areas of the world and we have always been a humanitarian Nation.

And when I read or heard some of the comments made a few days ago, I was disappointed and very upset. I was encouraged this afternoon, however. I understand that the Executive Committee of the AFL-CIO passed a resolution urging that the United States open its doors and make opportunities available for the South Vietnamese who have been driven or escaped from their country.

I understand that the American Jewish Committee has likewise passed a resolution this afternoon endorsing the policy of making opportunities available in the United States for South Vietnamese. And I am very proud of those Governors, like Governor Pryor of Arkansas, Governor Askew of Florida, Governor Longley of Maine, Governor Evans of Washington, Governor Ariyoshi of Hawaii, as well as Mayor Alioto, who have communicated with me and indicated their support for a policy of giving the opportunity of South Vietnamese to come from this country to escape the possibility of death in their country under the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, and individuals who wanted an opportunity for freedom.

I think this is the right attitude for Americans to take and I am delighted for the support that I have gotten.

MORE

QUESTION: Could I follow that and ask you, why in your judgment is there such a widespread adverse reaction to this?

THE PRESIDENT: I understand the attitude of some. We have serious economic problems. But out of the 120,000 refugees who are either here or on their way, 60 percent of those are children. They ought to be given an opportunity. Only 35,000 heads of families will be moved into our total society.

Now I understand people who are concerned with our economic problems, but we have assimilated between 50,000 and 100,000 Hungarians in the mid-50s and we have brought into this country some 500,000 to 600,000 Cubans. They have been good citizens and we ought to welcome these people in the same way, and despite our economic problems I am convinced that the vast majority of Americans today want these people to have another opportunity to escape the probability of death, and therefore I applaud those who feel that way.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to ask a political question. What steps have you taken so far toward the creation of a campaign organization in 1976, and if you haven't taken any steps, what steps do you plan to take in the future, and when do you plan to take them?

THE PRESIDENT: Within the last week a group headed by Dean Burch have indicated that they would like to get started in a very informal way to kick off a campaign at the proper time. This group is meeting within the next few days, I understand. They expect to get a great many more who will join them.

The precise time when we will take the formal step to declare my candidacy has not yet been determined, but I would only reiterate my intention to become a candidate.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you have said many times that you intend to become a candidate and yet there seems to be continual skepticism in some quarters of your own party that you really will be. Why do you think that skepticism has endured?

THE PRESIDENT: I am surprised myself that there is any skepticism. I know my intention. I have said it repeatedly, as you have indicated. I intend to be a candidate. I believe that I have the best opportunity to solidify the Republican Party, getting strength from both the right as well as the left within the Republican spectrum and to put on a good campaign against the individual that the Democratic Party nominates.

There should be no skepticism about my intention. I will be at the proper time a candidate in a legal sense and no one should feel otherwise.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I could follow that up. Will you this year be going out and speaking at Republican gatherings doing the kind of political things that Presidents often do in the year before they run for election?

THE PRESIDENT: I undoubtedly will make an effort to help the Republican Party. I think that is a proper function for a President. I did it a week or so ago for the Republican Party in the State of Virginia and I will do similar activities in the future.

But that effort will be aimed at helping the party. We need a strong two-party system and I have a responsibility to try and help the Republican Party.

Miss McGrory, may I congratulate you on your Pulitzer Prize, and I am delighted to recognize you.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I was wondering if now that the war is over for everybody and we are admitting many thousands of Vietnamese, including, we are told, some young men who did not obey their country's draft laws, have you reconsidered your position on amnesty towards young Americans?

THE PRESIDENT: Miss McGrory, about six months ago, I initiated a program under former Congressman Charles Goodell and a group of eight others, to grant relief, or amnesty, to some 120,000 individuals who were either deserters or did not comply with the Selective Service laws.

As I recollect, up to a week or so ago, approximately 30,000 out of that group had applied. I assume that most of them will have a change in their status. I hope so.

And therefore, I have taken, I think, a step that was right. It is a good program and I just wish that more had taken advantage of it.

At the present time, we are in the process, or they, the Commission, are in the process of handling the applications. I hope they will expedite and be very generous in their consideration of the records of those who have applied.

There is always a chance in the future if the facts justify it.

MORE

QUESTION: Even though the war is over, sir, there are many Americans who must still live with the agonies that it caused them. I speak primarily of those wounded and crippled and the families of those who died.

In very human and personal terms, how would you speak to them about the sacrifices that were made?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me say very emphatically they made a great sacrifice. The 56,000 that died and the countless thousands who were wounded, I honor and respect them and their contribution was most significant. I think their contribution was not in vain.

Five Presidents carried out a national policy. Six Congresses endorsed that policy, which was a policy of our country, and they carried out that responsibility as a member of our Armed Forces.

I think we should praise them, congratulate them, and we have an unbelievable commitment to them in the future. All we can say is, thank you very much for what they have done for freedom.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you mentioned that you spoke to some Virginia Republicans the weekend before last and at that time, you said that in 1976 we will have some excellent results in foreign policy. After the past few weeks, we can all use a little good news. Can you tell us just what you do expect in 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think between now and the end of 1976 we are going to make progress in the negotiations for a SALT II agreement. It hasn't been finalized, but the atmosphere is good.

There is going to be some hard negotiating, but I will approach that important meeting with Mr. Brezhnev aimed at achieving results, and I think his attitude will reflect the same.

I think you are going to find a greater solidarity in Europe. I am going to Europe the latter part of this month to strengthen that solidarity and to work on a more unified position in solving our joint economic problems, in trying to solve the energy problems that are serious for all of us.

It is my judgment that we can move ahead even in the Pacific. We will have to not reassess, but assess, how we can proceed, but it is my aim to tie more closely together South Korea with the United States, to reaffirm our commitments to Taiwan, to work more closely with Indonesia, with the Philippines, and with other Pacific nations. These are the kind of, I believe, forward movements in foreign policy that will be beneficial in the maintenance of peace.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, I would very much like to follow that up. Is your job going to be complicated by what happened in Southeast Asia? You have gone out of your way in the past week or two to say the United States will honor its foreign commitments. What sort of private feedback are you getting in foreign capitals? Is there a lack of confidence now? A loss of confidence in the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: We do get reactions from foreign governments wondering what our position will be, asking where we will go and what our policy will be. We have indicated to our friends that we will maintain our commitments. We understand the perception that some countries may have as a result of the setback in South Vietnam. But that perception is not a reality because the United States is strong militarily.

The United States is strong economically, despite our current problems, and we are going to maintain our leadership on a worldwide basis, and we want our friends to know that we will stand by them and we want any potential adversaries to know that we will stand up to them.

QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been persistent reports here in Washington that the Rockefeller Commission is looking into reports that somehow or the other, discussions of the assassination of Fidel Castro may have somehow triggered the assassination of John Kennedy. Can you tell us is there any connection between those two events?

THE PRESIDENT: I cannot give you the inside information on the Rockefeller Commission because I established it for the purpose of investigating the CIA and making any recommendations concerning it. It is my understanding that they are taking a very broad look. Until I get their report, I think it would be premature for me to make any comment as to precisely where they are going with their investigation.

Now, as a former member of the Warren Commission, a commission that I think did a good job, we found as a Warren Commission, no connection of anything between Cuba and the United States. We found no evidence of a conspiracy, foreign or domestic.

QUESTION: Mr. President, after eight years of a Republican in the White House, there probably will be a lot of people who next year will say it is time for a change. Now what accomplishments can you cite to rebut the argument that there should be such a change?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there ought to be a change. I strongly believe that a continuation of the basic policies of the last eight years will be good for America, and let me take a minute or two to talk about foreign policy.

A Republican Administration ended the war in Vietnam. They withdrew 550,000 American military personnel. They brought back all of the POW's. The United States under a Republican Administration took the first meaningful steps in trying to control nuclear arms, and I think we are going to have continued success in that area.

In the domestic area, we have gone through a difficult time, but when you look at the overall, a period of eight years, I think domestically there will be far more pluses than minuses and therefore it is my judgment that the American people, if we sell the program properly, we will have an excellent opportunity of prevailing in November of 1976.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on the economic issue, I assume that is what you are saying; but if the economy is at a low ebb next year, if unemployment is about what it is now, can you win?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think the economic concerns in 1976 will be comparable to those today. I think we are at the end of the recession. I believe that we can look forward to some improvement economically in the third and fourth quarters of 1975 and they ought to improve in 1976. Therefore, in my judgment, we will be looking in the future towards better times at home and a good foreign policy abroad.

MORE



QUESTION: Mr. President, events in Indochina outran the deliberative process of the Congress, and you weren't given clearly defined authority to use U.S. forces to evacuate there because of Cambodia and Vietnam.

My question goes to the matter of whether it was a personal dilemma for you as Commander-in-Chief to use U.S. forces without the expressed concurrence of the Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: Our prime objective, of course, both in the evacuation from Phnom Penh and Cambodia and in Saigon was to bring all Americans out of both locations. Now, in the process it did appear to be wise, particularly in Saigon, to take out a number of South Vietnamese.

We did that because, number one, we felt that a number of these South Vietnamese had been very loyal to the United States and deserved an opportunity to live in freedom and secondly, the possibility existed if we had not brought out some South Vietnamese, that there could have been anti-American attitudes develop that would have complicated the evacuation of our American personnel.

So, I felt that what we did could be fully justified in not only evacuating Americans, but evacuating some of the South Vietnamese who wanted to come to the United States.

QUESTION: Secretary Kissinger said that all of the Americans who wanted to leave South Vietnam were evacuated, but there may be some reason to believe not all were evacuated. Some organizations have, for example, reported at least eight missionaries captured in the Northern part of South Vietnam.

So, I am wondering if there is some process to check this sort of thing out and what could be done about it.

THE PRESIDENT: We certainly made a maximum effort to get every American out. We found in the last week that on a certain day they could tell us that there were 1,000 Americans that were ready to come out, and we would take 300 or 400 out and then the next day we would find that a number of other Americans had come into Saigon and wanted to get out.

So, we certainly made a tremendous effort to get all Americans out. I am sure there are some who are left. At this time, I can't give you the specifics as to how we will seek to get any Americans who are still there, but we will do all we can to achieve that result.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, you praised Ambassador Graham Martin's record in Vietnam, and you have also defended the evacuation of Vietnamese civilians. Yet, there is some evidence that Mr. Martin's actions made it impossible for some Vietnamese to escape who were longstanding employees of the U.S. Government and others were evacuated on the basis of their ability to pay.

Have you investigated any of these charges and do you still believe that Ambassador Martin's record is one of effectiveness?

THE PRESIDENT: Because of the ability of Ambassador Martin to handle a tough situation -- and it was very difficult -- we got all Americans out and we got roughly 120,000-plus South Vietnamese.

Now, I am familiar with some individuals who are critical of the way in which Ambassador Martin handled it. I never had much faith in Monday morning quarterbacks or grandstand quarterbacks. I would rather put faith in the man who carried out a very successful evacuation of Americans and a tremendous number of South Vietnamese.

Rather than be critical of somebody who I think did a good job, I think we ought to praise him. If some of these people want to, in hindsight, who didn't have the responsibility, criticize him, I think we will accept it for what it is worth.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, there has been some references tonight to the economic situation. The overall unemployment rate is nine percent but among black teenagers and young black males and some other minority groups it is three times that. What plans do you have to cope with the social consequences of that kind of unemployment?

THE PRESIDENT: We are concerned about the unemployment of the youth, particularly, and the highest percentage, of course, of unemployment falls in the black youth group.

I submitted to the Congress about a month ago a request for \$450 million, as I recollect, to fund a young people's employment program for this coming summer.

Now, unfortunately, the Congress has not approved that funding and the steps that have been taken, I think, will hamper the possibility of getting that funding to meet this problem, and they have added about \$3 billion over and above extra funding that I don't think can be justified.

If the Congress would approve the request that I made for roughly \$450 million, we would be in a position right now to do something about the problem that you raise.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the record of recent years is that that kind of summer jobs and that kind of thing has not prevented what really is a chronic long-term problem of 30 percent unemployment among young minority groups. What I am really asking is this: A great many economists think instead of coming out of this recession dramatically, we are just going to have a long period of stagflation where we don't have a really serious situation, but we don't have things very well indeed, and this kind of chronic unemployment among minority groups just persists.

What I am trying to find out is other than summer jobs and that kind of thing, do you think this is really a serious problem that the United States ought to address and try to do something about and if you do, what are your plans for it?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. I think it is a serious problem, but the most important problem is to meet the present difficulty which begins with the end of the school year, and that is why I think the Congress ought to act quickly on the request that I made for summer employment.

MORE

Now, in the long run, the best way to get the young people properly employed in our economy is to have a healthy economy, not a Government-dominated economy. I think we are in the process of coming out of the recession. I am optimistic in the future and when we, in the third and fourth quarters of this year, have the success that I think we are going to have, some of the problems will be answered that you have raised.

Mr. Jones?

QUESTION: You apparently had some intelligence reports about a bloodbath in Cambodia. I am wondering if you can bring us up to date on anything in this area in Cambodia and whether or not there is any report of a bloodbath in South Vietnam?

THE PRESIDENT: We do have some intelligence reports to the effect that in Cambodia some 80 or 90 former Cambodian officials were executed and, in addition, their wives were executed.

This is very hard intelligence. That is, I think, very factual evidence of the bloodbath that has taken place or is in the process of taking place in Cambodia.

Now, a turn to Vietnam. As you know, there is a very tight censorship in South Vietnam. The news that gets out is pretty heavily controlled by the North Vietnamese and by the Viet Cong. So, we really don't have the same kind of hard evidence there that we have had in Cambodia in the instance that I have indicated.

But I think probably the best evidence of the probability is that 120,000-plus South Vietnamese fled because they knew that the probability existed, that if they stayed, their life would be in jeopardy.

That is the best evidence of what probably will take place.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, if I may follow up on this, you say you don't have any hard evidence. Do you have any report, any intelligence reports that indicate this is going on?

THE PRESIDENT: At the moment, we have not.

QUESTION: May I ask you something, sir, and simply a matter of style and nothing of substance. Reading Mr. Hersey, who has spent a week with you, and reading others, you seem to be a kind of a peaceful, quiet man, a placid man. Do you ever get mad at people? Do you ever chew people out? Do you yell? Do you fire people? Do you kick people around?

THE PRESIDENT: I have learned to control my temper. I get very upset internally, but I have learned that that is not the best way to solve a problem. I do have occasional outbursts on the golf course, but in dealing with people I have found that the best way to meet a personnel problem or to handle a serious matter where a decision has to be made, that if you can keep cool, you can make a better decision. I have learned that over a long period of time.

QUESTION: If I may follow up, sir, you were described as very angry about those rumors that you were going through a political charade and were secretly not going to run -- this story in the news magazine a week or so ago. How did you express yourself?

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't shout.

QUESTION: They said you were damn mad.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't raise the devil with anybody. I simply indicated to my staff that the stories were totally untrue, which they are, and that no such meeting took place where such a policy was outlined by me.

I found the best way to handle the matter is to be very firm, very calm, but very forthright, dealing not only with my staff, but with others. I think they understand what I mean by the way I say it, but you don't have to shout to do it.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, Attorney General Levi has proposed banning of handguns in high crime areas, and the Justice Department says that the White House cleared that position before he made it clear.

Does that represent an extension of your proposal that the Saturday night specials only be controlled?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding that the Attorney General, when he made that speech, indicated that this was an alternative way of meeting the problem created by Saturday night specials.

It is my understanding that he didn't recommend this as the way to handle the problem. I think it is a unique approach, and it is being discussed with the Department of Justice within our Domestic Council, but there is no firm decision on whether that approach or any other approach is the right way to meet the problem.

QUESTION: Do you expect effective gun control legislation to be passed, and are you going to get behind effective control?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to recommend the registration of gun owners, and I am not going to recommend the registration of guns, or handguns, I should say.

If we can find some responsible way to do it other than that approach, we certainly will consider them.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, a growing number of Americans, lower and middle class, are being priced out of the housing market, and now there is new evidence that mortgage rates may be turning around, and indeed the FHA has increased its rate by half a percentage. Can you tell the American people tonight that makers of houses, potential buyers of houses -- can you give them any assurance that in the next months, the next year or two, more housing will be available at relatively moderate prices and that interest rates will stay down?

THE PRESIDENT: The most encouraging development in the housing area is the fact that the inflow of deposits in the savings and loans has gone up very substantially. It is my recollection that in the last reported month about \$4 billion in deposits flowed into savings and loans and that over the last three months it has been a very favorable inflow into the S and L's. This means, of course, that there is money available for home buyers and it is my judgment that once we start the upturn from the present recession that the consumer interest in buying homes will increase significantly and with the money available in the S and L's, I think the prospects for an upturn in the housing industry are very encouraging.

QUESTION: Do you then approve the FHA increase, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: I approve the increase because if you are going to have FHA handling of mortgages, if you are going to have the government guarantees, they must be competitive with other interest rates, and I happen to think that an FHA loan or a VA loan, either are very good, and we want those competitive with the regular conventional interest rates, and therefore to make them competitive I agreed with the decision.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very, very much.

END

(AT 8:05 P.M. EDT)