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THE WHITE HOUSE

INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY

SID DAVIS

WESTINGHOUSE BROADCASTING WASHINGTON

BUREAU CHIEF

STAN BORMAN

BELVA DAVIS

JENNY CRIMM

AND

LYNN JOINER

KPIX-TV

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QUESTION: Mr. President, just recently this city went through a traumatic and somewhat extraordinary set of circumstances when the fire department and the police department all went out on strike at the same time.

I am sure you were aware of that. This is somewhat of an indication of what possibly might happen in major cities across the country.

How do you, as the Chief Executive, feel about this, sir? Do you think that, number one, policemen should be allowed to go out on strike and, number two, if you feel they shouldn't, do you think there should be a Federal law prohibiting strikes by all municipal workers?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, the problem that you raise is 100 percent a local problem in that the Federal Government has no jurisdiction to enact legislation or to take Executive action to force a procedure or a method for resolving disputes between local employees and the responsible city officials.

The situation in San Francisco ought to be settled by the people of this community. It ought to be settled perhaps as some States have, by enacting State legislation. That is within the jurisdiction of the State, as well as the local community.

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The only area where the Federal Government has any authority is that involving Federal employees, and when a few years ago, I think it was 1970, the Congress established a postal service system in contrast to the old Postal Department, the Congress approved a procedure for arbitration in case the Government and the employees couldn't get together.

That does, in effect, provide, number one, for a procedure for a firm determination, and it also includes a provision that prohibits a strike by postal service employees. I voted for that legislation.

QUESTION: Mr. Ford, on another topic, there are reports that a man was arrested and booked today here in San Francisco on suspicion of threatening you and, also, following your own close brush with death in Sacramento a couple of weeks, I wonder if this has convinced you at all that we need tough gun control legislation in this country or are public officials going to have to travel across the country with a bullet-proof vest and a prayer?

THE PRESIDENT: I did recommend to the Congress earlier this year a rather comprehensive approach to crime control, a new proposal that would make it much more difficult for individuals to get what we call Saturday night specials, which are the cheap handguns that are used extensively for illegal purposes.

In addition, I proposed to the Congress that we have much more severe penalties for a person using a gun in the commission of some other crime and for mandatory sentences in order to get people who use guns in the process of committing a crime or alleged crime.

It seems to me that that approach is far, far better than the approach of some people who recommend that gun owners should be registered and that handguns and long guns ought to be registered.

I prefer to go after the person who uses the gun for illegal or criminal purpose. That, to me, is a far better approach than the one where you require registration of the individual or the gun.

QUESTION: Mr. President, yesterday Secretary of Defense Schlesinger said that any new weapons we introduce into the Middle East, or Israel, should not, to use his words, overawe Israel's neighbors.

In the interim agreement we have signed with Israel, we are promising new weapons and there is the prospect of the Pershing missile, which has the range that could touch just about all of Israel's neighbors.

Aren't we creating the prospects of the seeds for a monstrous new arms race in the Middle East?

THE PRESIDENT: Not if it is properly handled, Sid.

The shopping list that the Government of Israel submitted to the United States Government included a very substantial number of weapons, most of which are defensive in nature.

The Pershing missile request, we -- the United States -- only promised to study. We made no commitment that we would make that weapon available and in the process of study, we will have some time to see how the peace efforts, the Sinai peace agreement proceeds along with potential other agreements in that area.

But, there is no commitment by us except to study for the delivery of a Pershing missile to the Middle East.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, today in a speech you said that you envision some 200 nuclear power plants by the year 1985. Here in California enough citizens are concerned about the safety and disposal problems of these plants to have put it in issue on the ballot in June to ban the construction of them. How do you feel about the safety problem and about the disposal problem?

THE PRESIDENT: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which was established by the Congress last year and which is now in operation, and the Energy Research and Development Organization, which was likewise established by the Congress, both are in the process of studying safety, nuclear power development, et cetera.

So far, I believe that the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence indicates, number one, that we have a safe nuclear power capability and furthermore that, if there are any serious questions, that the further research and development will result in even a higher degree of safety, better safeguards.

I think in light of our serious, almost critical energy shortage, that it is unwise for any State to ban the development and the utilization of nuclear power in the future.

We expect to build 250 nuclear power plants, as I recall, in the next ten years. If 49 other States do it, I can imagine there could be a serious, adverse economic impact on the State of California.

It would potentially -- I don't say certainly, but potentially -- interfere with the economic development of the great State of California. It would mean the loss of potential jobs as we need more jobs for the young people, for others.

I think there is a better approach than an arbitrary ban because the safety record so far and the prognostications of responsible people indicate to me, at least, that the danger is not a serious one and, if there are any problems, they can be resolved.

QUESTION: Mr. President, we are very glad to see you back in California again, and I understand you will be returning against next month.

The question is why three trips in less than a month and a half and, if this California blitz -- if you will pardon the expression -- is really just to try to sidetrack Ronald Reagan's shadow campaign for the nomination in 1976?

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THE PRESIDENT: Our plans to come to California two weeks ago and the plans for this current weekend were made a good many months ago. They were made because we have visited, or I have attended, a number of meetings of a variety of organizations.

I spoke at Pepperdine University on Saturday, at Stanford University on Sunday. I spoke at the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Workers Convention this morning, or on Monday. I spoke to the World Affairs Council in San Francisco.

It is a whole list of very diverse organizations that give me an opportunity to get acquainted with their interests and to indicate my policies.

California is a big -- it is an important State. We want Californians to understand their President, and I want to get to know Californians. It has really no relevance as far as the political campaign is concerned.

I am coming back in October for a purely Republican Party function. That is a different type of activity, and I think it is important for me, as the head of the party, to participate.

QUESTION: There is one other Californian you did speak to. You spoke to Richard Nixon yesterday. Why did the White House wait until today to report that, and will you accept Richard Nixon's help in your campaign in 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: My relationship with the former President is a personal one, a personal friendship that has existed for 26 years. I don't think it is necessary for us to volunteer when I call him or he should happen to call me.

It is my understanding that if Ron Nessen was asked, he would say yes, I called the President, I am in the State where he lives, within a relatively short distance of his home.

I think it is a perfectly natural thing for longstanding friends to talk on the telephone.

His participation in 1976 is a matter for him to decide, and we will wait and see what he does decide.

QUESTION: If he decides, would you want his help?

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THE PRESIDENT: I don't think you accept anything in the political arena. A person has to make a choice himself as to what he wants to do. We have no plans to ask him, but if a person decides, it is a free country. He can participate in any way that he wishes, but that is a personal choice for him.

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QUESTION: So by that answer, Mr. President, without trying to put words in your mouth, you would not reject his help or whatever support he would give you?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a matter of semantics. What he does is his decision. We are going to run my campaign, as I said several months ago, on my record and on our program for the future. If people want to help, I can't preclude it. It is up to them to decide.

QUESTION: I have a couple of questions, sir, about the Central Intelligence Agency which has been in the news, as we all know, for the past year or so with mounting rapidity.

First off, are you frightened by the latest revelations of the CIA, namely, the Cobra venom stockpile, the shellfish toxin stockpile, the poison dart guns supposedly they have and the latest story that broke over the weekend that alleges that E. Howard Hunt supposedly was supposed to kill columnist Jack Anderson. Do these allegations frighten you, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I think you have to go back to the charter that President Truman recommended to the Congress and the Congress in 1947 wrote into law in the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency. As I recall -- I wasn't in the Congress at that time -- that it was virtually unanimous that President Truman's proposed Central Intelligence Agency should be established by law, it was given a charter and given certain responsibilities. And the Central Intelligence Agency over this period of 27 or 28 years has carried out its responsibilities under the law.

Now, there may have been certain indiscretions or actions or programs that border on being outside of that charter and that is what the Congress is in the process of examining. And I think it is a very proper responsibility for the Congress, in an oversight capacity, to examine such as they have in both the Church Committee and the Pike Committee, the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you mentioned former President Harry Truman and it was published in the Washington Post on December 22, 1963, a column that was written by the former President. In that he said, "The role of the CIA should be limited to intelligence, there is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position in this country and I feel that we need to correct it."

That was 12 years ago. Do you feel there should be some limitations on the power of the CIA and, if so, what limitations?

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THE PRESIDENT: The basic limitations come from the law. The operation under the charter comes from the people who have the responsibility.

It is, I think, very proper for Congress to conduct an oversight operation, as they are, and it is very probable that there ought to be a greater control exercised through the Executive Branch over the operations of the CIA.

We have an organization, have had for a good many years, an intelligence advisory committee that has a relationship in a broad sense to the CIA and the intelligence community. There have been suggestions that this advisory group ought to be given more authority to actually supervise the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency and the others. There has been no decision by me as yet on whether that group or some other group, or in some other way, we might have a closer control over the operations on a day-to-day basis of the Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence community. Those are possibilities.

Within the very near future, I expect to make administrative recommendations, I expect to make legislative proposals as far as the intelligence agencies are concerned.

I did not answer, Stan, one previous question you indicated concerning columnist Jack Anderson.

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QUESTION: Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: As I read the newspapers -- I haven't gotten any further information on that -- that was not connected with the Central Intelligence Agency. That was an alleged arrangement or program between certain people in the White House in the 1970-1971 period. It did not involve the CIA.

Therefore, I don't think the CIA should be connected or condemned with that allegation. They have enough troubles on their own.

QUESTION: Mr. Ford, to get on the topic of energy for a second, it is obvious that Russia needs our wheat and we need oil. You have been quoted as saying that it is conceivable and quite possible that America would negotiate with the Soviets for oil in exchange for wheat.

Getting out of the possible, the conceivable realm, is it going to become a reality?

THE PRESIDENT: We have made very substantial, encouraging, optimistic progress in negotiation with the Soviet Union for the Soviet Union on a five-year agreement to buy substantial amounts of American grain, a set amount as a minimum and potentially more on an option basis.

This would help to equalize the purchases over a period of time instead of the wide fluctuations where one year they buy very little, the next year they buy a tremendous amount.

We think that a firm, long-term wheat or grain agreement with the Soviet Union is good for the American agriculture, for the farmers, for the consumers.

It also will increase the, I think, effectiveness of detente between the Soviet Union and the United States.

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We hope to have an answer on this problem within the very near future and I might add that, if it is signed, we will also get an additional benefit and this important here in the Bay area, the West Coast, in that we will get a better freight rate for American ships in the delivery or the shipment of American grain to Soviet ports, which would mean that about 35 American ships would come out of lay-up and go into the trade and provide more jobs for American seamen.

So it is a complicated but very intriguing and, I think, important negotiation. I am optimistic that it will work out.

QUESTION: Yes, but are you going to push for the oil since we need that so desperately? Are you going to push for that?

THE PRESIDENT: That is another aspect and there are discussions and there are potential negotiations going on between the United States and the Soviet Union, linking to some extent but not directly, grain and oil.

This is a much more complicated subject. We have plenty of oil today and an agreement with the Soviet Union for oil would be sort of a good insurance policy in case there was an oil embargo from the Middle East.

If Russia has oil that it wants to sell, and we need some, which I think would be good insurance, I think it makes sense to try and get both a grain deal and an oil deal.

QUESTION: Sir, on the subject of energy and oil, you fought long and hard for decontrol of domestic oil, indicating that the rise in price would some how help us to conserve somewhat.

How high are you willing to see the price of a gallon of gasoline go before reversing that procedure?

THE PRESIDENT: It is higher than I would like right now. (Laughter)

On the other hand, it has to some extent helped us to conserve, it has helped us to prevent the squandering of some of our energy sources.

I believe, however, that the price rise has gone sufficiently high and, if we can get an energy program on line, it is my opinion that any further price rise will be minimal.

As a matter of fact, if the Congress had approved my phased decontrol program over a 39-month period, in the first 12 months of that phased decontrol program, energy prices related to oil would have gone down.

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Unfortunately, the Congress wasn't wise enough to understand it or to take action to approve it. So now that they have rejected a phased decontrol program, we are pretty much faced with total decontrol, which is not the best alternative, but even with total decontrol, I don't think you are going to have any significant increases in fuel costs.

QUESTION: Wouldn't that, though, if it did happen, really hit at the poor, the working class more than anybody else because they would be the ones who could not afford to pay the prices?

THE PRESIDENT: It would affect everybody but I urge you to go back to what I said in January when I offered a comprehensive energy program. I said, "If there are any energy cost increases, we would rebate to the American people \$12 billion for added energy costs by a reduction in income tax payments. We would give \$80.00 a person to the poor who had no income to compensate them for the added energy costs.

Again Congress has not acted on the rebate program that I recommended. I wish they had. We wouldn't be faced with a problem of, to some extent, adding energy burdens to the American people.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your travels around the country, you have persistently launched an attack against the Federal Government and big government and the Federal Bureaucracy and at one point promised to get the government off people's back and out of their pockets. Yet today here in San Francisco you are proposing a \$100 billion government corporation to be established subject to the approval of Congress to help find ways to develop our energy resources. This would include massive amounts of Federal money.

How do you square that with your comments about less government? Are we admitting that we cannot solve our energy problems in the private sector?

THE PRESIDENT: Most of our energy problems can and will be solved in the private sector, but there are some programs where we are in the process of exotic research and development -- solar energy for example -- where once the scientists and technicians have developed the capability for expansion of that energy source, we do have to take the first step from research and development to an operational plant to prove that it will work.

That first plant, so to speak, has to be perhaps financed by this joint government private sector program. And that is what the energy resource corporation will be aimed at, not in a long range financing of energy sources, but aimed at primarily, not exclusively but primarily taking the position from completion of research and development to the first use where there is a hesitancy on the part of investors, because of the uncertainty to invest.

This is where I think we have to act. We did in the case of the synthetic rubber plant in World War II. We did it in the Manhattan Project with the atomic bomb. We did it in our efforts to get to the moon. We have done it with COMSAT.

It is a procedure that has been used in the past, and I think it can be adequately used in the future.

QUESTION: In doing so, you are leaving yourself open to a charge by probably your critics that you are going to have billions of dollars in Federal funding going to big oil and big business, and this leads me to the question.

The public's perception of your Administration is one that is friendly to big business. I think in your relationship with labor leaders you would find that, and recently in a Gallup Poll, Mr. Gallup said that of the adults who were questioned--and he addressed this nationwide--only 21 percent would own up to being Republicans and then you have the results of New Hampshire.

Would this indicate to you that you are in serious trouble in 1976 as a party, and you as President?

THE PRESIDENT: I think any of the polls that have pitted me against a Democrat, with the exception of Ted Kennedy -- and even there one month he is ahead and the next month I am ahead -- but pitting my own candidacy against any other Democrat, every poll that I have seen for the last six months shows that I would win.

We have 14 months to go before the election, and my Democratic friends have to pick a candidate first, and they are going to have a little trouble there, but I welcome whoever they pick. But, I think it is categorically inaccurate and unfair, and I don't think it is said by people who have thought it out, that this Administration is predominantly interested in big business. That is totally inaccurate.

We have increased our funding, for example, in a wide spectrum -- education, unemployment compensation, the whole area of human assistance. We have recommended in the budget for the current fiscal year more money than any Administration in the history of the United States for social programs.

QUESTION: Mr. Ford, I am sorry to cut off because I understand you probably want to go further. We only have about thirty seconds left, and I wondered if you could in that time possibly sum up how you would talk to some of the young people of this country about their mounting fear of losing control of their country, what with the murder of a President, the murder of a candidate running for President, paralyzing of another, et cetera. It goes on and on, still even happening today with a threat against your life. What do you tell the young people of this country?

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THE PRESIDENT: I tell them that, number one, we have a great country, they have a great stake in it. They can decide what course of action, what aims, what visions we should have in this country, and I find a great and good response from the young people across the board.

I am optimistic about what they will do with America. I think they will make it a better place for them and those that follow.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 3:22 P.M. PDT)