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INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT
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ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE

QUESTION: Mr. President, that interview we had a year ago in your office -- you said your goals for 1975 were to restore a reputation for integrity to the Presidency, combat inflation and recession. Can you make a progress report, or at least, how far do you think we've come in those areas?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have restored integrity in the White House, without any question whatsoever. I don't read or hear any challenges on that issue at all, from any sources, integrity is restored.

Number two, I look at the record of inflation. A year ago when we had the interview, inflation was roughly in the 12 percent area. It is now down to 6 to 7 percent. It has been going down gradually; increasing progress will be made. We have had some setbacks with employment. A year ago we had unemployment at roughly 6 percent. As I recall, in December it soared, but it is now on a downward path, and I'm convinced it is going to continue to recede. It is higher than we want it, but it has been done responsibly and I am optimistic that as the year progresses in 1976, it might be gradual, but I think proper improvements in that area will be made.

In foreign policy, we had one setback that I regretted in Vietnam, but if you look around the rest of the world, we made good progress. I think NATO is stronger today. Foreign leaders believe that the United States will stand strong with them in our NATO commitments.

In the Middle East, we recovered from the March problem and we ended up with a good settlement. Our relations with Japan have never been better-- the combination of my trip to Japan and the Emperor's visit to the United States.

If we looked at the Pacific as a whole, the trip to China was another building block in the relationship which is not only vital currently, but extremely important in the years ahead.

The trip to Indonesia, the trip to the Philippines, were helpful in restoring, I think, their confidence in our commitment in the Pacific.

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So, as you look at the overall, we are at peace now and we see, or foresee, no major problem materializing despite differences we have in Angola and failure at this point, and I emphasize at this point, to achieve the SALT II.

I think the prospects of that area are still encouraging. I think it is right that we can get an agreement that is mutually beneficial -- that it is in the world's interests. I think there are developments that might lead us to constructive SALT II agreements.

QUESTION: If that is the record, then why do you think your Administration is in trouble, or do you accept the judgment that it is in trouble?

THE PRESIDENT: Perception-wise, I think we have to admit that the benefits that I have enumerated have not yet been understood by the majority of the American people. They have gone through a traumatic 15 to 18 months and it was hard for individuals, it was hard for segments of our society, and the encouraging signs have not yet been fully perceived. So I understand them.

But I am also encouraged because I believe these are accomplishments the American people, in the long run, will recognize and will respond to.

QUESTION: When you talk about a traumatic experience, I'm not sure I know what you mean?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we had the problem of Vietnam. We had the problem of inflation. We had the problem of extremely high unemployment, plus things that had happened before. The assassinations, riots -- now, even terrorism -- that seems to be worldwide, even in our own country. This has been a tough time, an unusually different and difficult time. And so some of the bad news tends to overcome the good things that are happening slowly, but constructively.

QUESTION: I noticed in that interview a year ago that you said that you were going to have a strong, tough, effective program, that you expressed some doubt as to whether you were going to be able to sell it or explain it as effectively to the American people. How do you view your own performance in that particular explanation, or sales job, this past year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we've done better than we might have expected, but we haven't done as well as I would have liked. In the case of energy, we had a good program, but we had strong opposition in the Congress, dominated by the Democrats, who had a different approach. We ended up with a program that wasn't entirely to my liking.

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On the other hand, it is a start. If we can get deregulation of natural gas, in my opinion, we will be well on the road to energy independence, with some of the other countries in the world. To answer your question, maybe a little differently, when you bear in mind the forces in the Congress who had different views, it wasn't a single opportunity for me to be selling one viewpoint because they were rebutting it, they were contradicting it, acting in opposition on a number of occasions. So, bearing in mind those problems, I think we sold energy reasonably well.

QUESTION: I gather from your response that you don't really feel that the Administration is in any kind of trouble that a lot of these year-end pieces have suggested.

THE PRESIDENT: I do not.

QUESTION: Do you take seriously this poll that shows Reagan leading ahead of you, running ahead of you. Does that worry you or concern you -- that you are in more trouble than you ought to be after having done the kind of things you talked about?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the polls don't accurately reflect basic public appreciation of the problems we've come out of and the progress that we are making. In the long run, I think the final vote in November will be a far better judge.

QUESTION: Why wouldn't the polls reflect it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, in the process of making some very difficult decisions, whether it was vetoing some legislation that had popular titles or struggling to force New York City to bail itself out, or to convince the Congress that if they were going to have a tax reduction, they had to have an expenditure limitation, these are not necessarily popular decisions today, and the immediate reaction of the public can be adverse, but in the long run, when they see the progress that will materialize, I think the polls will reflect a different situation.

QUESTION: You have referred a couple of times now to an obvious conflict with Congress. When you expressed a year ago in that interview optimism about the possibility of cooperation with Congress, was that just a throw-away line, or was it your feeling at that time that there was the possibility. And why has it turned out to be a pattern of conflict, really, in both domestic and foreign policy?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it was right to start out with the assumption that even a very partisan Congress I could work with. To have started out with the assumption that we were going to be at logger heads for the next 24 months would have been the wrong thing substantively, as well as psychologically.

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Now, yes, we have had some differences, but I think there are some other areas where we've worked things out to a reasonably constructive end result.

And when you bear in mind that they had better than two to one, that they came down here with what they considered to be a mandate, and were going to challenge me, I think they were more adamant than the challenge than I was. We have ended up in some areas of substantial agreement. It took a veto or two to bring about some results, again the tax cut and spending limitations. I think we ended up with a reasonably good position with me or the Administration to achieve a spending limitation in relationship between a tax cut and spending restraints.

I think the Congress now knows that that is what the American people want and that they have got to conform to that.

QUESTION: One of the areas of conflict you have had with the Congress where the vote was very heavily against you was on this Angola thing. Can you see any sign, first of all, that there is going to be any change of perception in Congress? And, secondly, failing that, if you have to, if the Administration has to live with the vote you now have, is there anything that you can do to further the cause of peace in Angola?

THE PPRESIDENT: Well, as you know, the money that we have, small as it is, is being spent in trying to achieve the stand-off which will result in the people of Angola, the three forces there, settling it themselves. Hopefully, this can be done through the diplomatic efforts that are underway with the OAU, and through other sources.

If that is not achieved within the somewhat restrained time, and if Congress persists in their, I think, very unwise action, in my opinion, it would be a bad signal around the world, a very serious one. Again, I'm optimistic.

I think with the money we are spending, and actions of other nations, the OAU, and, I think, a new spirit of compromise that may be developing within the three forces in Angola, that situation might be resolved.

QUESTION: Have you seen any signs, since you made that very strong statement nine or ten days ago, any sign the Russians or Cubans took your warning to heart?

THE PRESIDENT: Nothing on the surface. But, we certainly are working with all the forces to try to avoid head-to-head conflict and we are certainly seeking to prevent Angola from destroying the constructive things that are being accomplished, the detente with the Soviet Union, but nothing at the moment that is visible that is as encouraging as I would like.

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QUESTION: Is it your judgment, sir, that the Russians have the same basic approach -- that they would not want Angola to disturb the process of detente?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think they recognize a detente in its broadest context--SALT, MBFR, and a wide variety of other things, really have a greater meaning than an unfortunate head-to-head conflict in Angola.

QUESTION: Do you see them now playing a role of seeking conciliation and compromise in Angola?

THE PRESIDENT: I see nothing on the surface.

QUESTION: You mentioned detente a moment ago -- do you expect detente to be an issue in American politics in 1976?

THE PRESIDENT: If it is an issue and it leads to destruction, I think it will be a very unfortunate development for world and international affairs.

QUESTION: Would you prefer to see that it not be an issue at all -- for you, against you -- that it not be a part of the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is inevitable that it be an issue, but if those that make it an issue destroy that relationship, it will be very unfortunate for world peace.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I was asked by the office to ask you one question about this matter of Woodward and Bernstein's story about the pardon. We'd like just to get this cleared up, for the record.

Could you just give us your best recollection of that conversation that you had with General Haig, I think the date was on August 28, and particularly whether he recommended a pardon, and whether you said anything in that conversation that would lead him to conclude that you were going to issue a pardon?

THE PRESIDENT: First, let me say that my best recollection -- everything that took place vis a vis the pardon -- I said in the testimony, whether it was a prepared text or whether it was in response to a question, was the testimony before the House Committee. Everything was fresh in my mind then. Rather than trying to recollect details today, 14 months later, I rely exclusively on the testimony that I gave.

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As I recall, I told Ron that in preparation for the press conference of the 20th, there were five or six people from the staff who sat there and asked questions. Al Haig was there, and to my recollection Al never said one thing concerning the pardon. But, of course, in preparation for the press conference, the pardon question never came up. It was just how we would answer the question as to the Department of Justice. What I said to the House Committee was to my best recollection on every aspect of the pardon, and any changes that I might make now would be a less vivid recollection.

QUESTION: And that testimony, as I recall, substantively, was that nobody had urged you to issue a pardon.

THE PRESIDENT: There was never a thought in my mind on the 28th, I assure, that I would issue a pardon.

QUESTION: You have undoubtedly become aware of some of the depictions and cartoons of you lately -- Newsweek described you as an amiable bumbler, and there was a cartoon in the Denver Post which managed to take care of your skiing and your campaign manager in one swoop. How do you feel personally about being depicted in the national news media in this fashion, first of all, and, second of all, do you think it is damaging to you in terms of getting done what you want to do?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I think it is an inaccurate depiction. I feel very strongly, after having the firm belief that I think it is inaccurate, I have mixed reactions. One, most of the critics who have never played in a ball game, never skied, I don't know whether it is a self defense mechanism in themselves or what, but I'm kind of amused at that. It doesn't bother me at all.

On the other hand, this is a hot political year. Historically, cartoonists, commentators, news writers, over the years, they've been writing a long, long time, and they have had a lot of fun with Presidents and Presidential candidates. It is just part of the American sense of humor, I guess, and you have to live with it. The main thing is you don't have to believe it, and I don't.

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QUESTION: It seemed that when you were in Vail to most of us that you were really enjoying yourself skiing, going out to parties with friends. You have a lot of good things, and you had a long, successful, prominent career, culminated with the Presidency.

Why do you want to be President for the next four years? Why not just give it away and let someone else go in?

THE PRESIDENT: A very good question, and I have thought a lot about it. I have taken a look at every Democratic or Republican candidate, and there are some very good people. The job of being President of the United States requires, I think, considerable knowledge about how the Federal Government works, the problems of foreign policy, and some candidates, in my opinion, haven't had the necessary experience.

Other candidates have such a totally different philosophy from mine and what I think is the basic philosophy of the American people. When I look at the wide choice, I think that my experience, my total philosophy and my integrity, my approach to the problems is the best choice the American people have.

I think they need me. I think I can contribute vis-a-vis any of the other candidates. And that is not ego, it is just a practical analysis. I want to do it because I think it is good for the country.

QUESTION: What do you think the biggest gap between you and Mr. Reagan is in terms of experience or philosophy?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the answer is quite evident. There is some deviation in philosophy. If anything, I am more middle of the road than he, and I certainly think I have a lot more experience.

QUESTION: Reagan talked in his opening statement about breaking up the buddy system in Washington. Do you think there is a buddy system in Washington? Specifically, do you think you are too much a part of those long years of Congressional and now Executive service to really bring about the kind of major change that you and he have both talked about in the direction of Government?

THE PRESIDENT: I am convinced that the relations that I have in the Congress with Democratic leaders is something that no other Republican candidate has, and I think that the number of instances that it has been a constructive relationship in the last 16 months that I doubt that any newcomer could have any such rapport.

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Now, that doesn't mean I agree with Mike Mansfield, the Speaker, Tip O'Neill, on a lot of things. We don't. I am absolutely convinced that the personal relationship of that kind be very crucial on some very tough problems, domestically or internationally, affecting this country.

I don't condemn those personal relationships. I think they are good, they are healthy. I thank God we have them in this country, and I doubt if anyone who has not served in Congress can start out with that relationship.

QUESTION: Can you think of any circumstances under which your present frame of mind, your optimism in talking about your accomplishments, could be changed, where you would not want to run for office? I guess I am thinking what if Reagan does well in the early primaries while you are in Washington?

Would that change your mind or change anything?

THE PRESIDENT: Number one, any disappointment in early primaries, instead of making me less enthusiastic, would probably stimulate me to work harder. Under no circumstances that I can foresee today -- and I am very categorical in that -- am I not going to be in Kansas City as a candidate, and as a winning candidate. Anyone who thinks I am going to quit in midstream doesn't know Jerry Ford.

QUESTION: Does that mean that you would continue, as I gather from what you said recently, to work at the White House rather than campaign in the primaries, even if Reagan should win the first couple?

THE PRESIDENT: That is hard to specify right now. My primary responsibility is being President. I am optimistic about the way if I do a good job there it will have a good impact in any primary. I do think that in primaries there has to be some kind of campaigning. It will be limited, but it will be some participation.

But, to come back to the main thrust -- which is my primary job, being President -- I am going to work at it, and we will find what limited time there is to campaign.

QUESTION: Who do you see as the main thrust in 1976? Are you -- well, let me ask you specifically. Does the \$395 billion budget ceiling preclude any new program initiatives in 1976?

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THE PRESIDENT: It all depends on how you define new programs. If you are defining new wild, liberal domestic programs, the answer is yes. If the answer is aimed at some new programs that make the services of Government better for the people, like consolidations, by efforts to streamline the services rendered right now, there is a distinct possibility there will be some major proposals.

It is all new programming. It is a matter of how you define it. We aren't going to come up with a Johnson shopping list of 1965. What we are going to do is have some new programs that I think will make the taxpayer's dollar do a better job of providing the responsible services of the Federal Government.

QUESTION: Will that include anything in the area of welfare reform?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think that I should go into that.

QUESTION: You are going to talk about the programs in the State of the Union Message?

THE PRESIDENT: Right, and they will be part of any budget.

QUESTION: I am going to ask one more question. It seems like while you were on vacation in Vail, while you always seem courteous to us, at times some of us thought that you -- like the President's before you -- would like a lot more privacy than you get.

Does it bother you to have a press conference in every street corner, to have Secret Service men surrounding you when you ski, to have everything recorded. I mean, you have been in Congress, but that didn't happen. Does that bother you at all?

THE PRESIDENT: I think a press conference is a very serious matter. Ron and Dick know I spend considerable time preparing for it. When I ski and come down, and see ten or 20 people there, I haven't gone through the mental process of worrying about what questions are gonna pop up, so maybe the questions aren't as good or the answers certainly aren't as well prepared.

But, I just accept that. It doesn't bother me, as long as you don't take advantage of the fact that I am not starting at the top of the mountain and thinking all the way down about what Lou Cannon and Dave Broder are going to ask me. But I don't.

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QUESTION: I didn't put my question very well. I am really interested most of all in discussing whether the President lives too much in a goldfish bowl and doesn't have enough privacy.

Now, there have been stories written about your drinking, for instance, in which I would be welcome to have any comments you want to make about it. Does that kind of very personal stuff bother you, or does it seem that it goes so far that it is harmful to the Presidency?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there is too much intrusion in our personal life. I think our children feel it on their personal life, but I don't think it intrudes too much on mine.

QUESTION: What about your health?

THE PRESIDENT: At 62 I am probably as healthy as any person at 62, and any allegation of that kind is just totally inaccurate, and you know I am. Somebody is trying to collect all the health records of the candidates. We went through that experience in the hearings on my Vice Presidential confirmation.

Despite the Navy's reluctance, we got all of my records from the Navy, health records and the whole damn thing, and it is laid out there, every health exam, as I understand it, on an annual basis.

I think I would be delighted to have my health record put on the table. Dr. Lukash may object, but I think it is good. I would have laid mine against anybody else's.

QUESTION: I want to take a stab with one more area of programs for 1976. Beyond the tax cut and your own recommendation for the addition of \$10 billion beyond what Congress passed, do you have in mind any specific steps either to reduce unemployment in 1976 or to provide additional income for those who are unemployed?

THE PRESIDENT: We think the economic program that we will submit as a part of the State of the Union will provide more jobs and a healthier economy. We think that the programs for the unemployed today, 65 months of unemployment compensation, with the prospects of the economy improving, I think everybody agrees that this is happening.

I don't believe there is any need for a major overhaul in the unemployment system. I think the tax proposal that I submitted for \$28 billion, which is ten more than Congress passed, will be a stimulant to the free enterprise system. We will have some specific additions to make, where I think there are current inequities, but we haven't itemized every one of them at the present time.

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QUESTION: When I was in Houston at the Southern Republican Conference the week after that China trip, I heard a lot of criticism of Mr. Callaway, not coming from Reagan people, but coming from your own loyalists and hard fighting supporters in the South.

Yesterday, I understand -- although I don't know this in my own direct knowledge -- Mr. Malloy, the Dade County chairman for you in Florida, was quite critical of some aspects of the campaign.

First of all, do you take these criticism of Callaway seriously when they are coming from your own people? Do you intend to do anything about it if you do?

THE PRESIDENT: We obviously do take recognizance of responsible criticism and where the criticism is justified, we have tried to work out a better way to handle this problem or that problem. Overall, though, I would say Bo Callaway has done a good job. It is inevitable that a man with that responsibility is bound to be criticized.

This is a highly charged political year, and you are going to -- I think that any campaign chairman would inevitably be criticized by this leader and this county or this Republican leader in another State. It is inevitable.

But, overall, when you look -- and I see the reports every week, the organization, funding and so forth -- I think Bo has done a good job.

QUESTION: Do those reports come from Bo, or are you getting some kind of independent evaluation?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I get a, what do we call it, weekly report that the campaign organization around the country --

QUESTION: People like those in your transition group, do they tell you your campaign is going well?

THE PRESIDENT: I think on balance they say it is going well. They obviously have some criticisms. That is why I meet with them, because you look at that group, they are a pretty good cross-section. I don't meet with them just to have a lot of sweet talk. They are pretty hard-boiled people, and they are good friends of mine, and what they say is not against me but to help.

Therefore, I think those meetings are very beneficial. When they make a comment, they are critical, and we try to sit down with Bo and with others to remedy what the criticism brought on.

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QUESTION: Let me ask you specifically a question that I have in mind. A number of your spokesmen and various people in your campaign, Stu Spencer, have said pretty much what it seems to me you have said here and in other places, that there are 30 primaries. You could lose two or three along the way. You are not going to drop out.

That doesn't mean you have lost the nomination if you lose some primaries. Then Mr. Callaway comes down and says although he was certainly not sandbagged with the question, given every opportunity to answer, says you are going to win all 54 jurisdictions, and he repeated that statement.

Now, if you are covering this campaign, frankly, the question is which spokesman of Gerald Ford do you believe. I don't necessarily dispute Callaway, but isn't there a problem there? How do you deal with something like that?

THE PRESIDENT: Bo is a salesman, and you don't expect a salesman to go out and say that the product is not the best, and what Bo was saying is what he believed. I would rather have somebody out there who is enthusiastic, taking the offense, rather than the defense. I don't criticize Bo for that. If we had a guy who sat around being pessimistic, I don't think that would be very helpful.

I want Bo to get out there and really talk on the offense. Now, that doesn't mean we won't have a setback or two. But, if we have one or two, that is not going to change my going to Kansas City and winning. We are going to be there in full, enthusiastic and fighting trim.

QUESTION: What do you think about Ronald Reagan? You have met him. You have had dinner with him. You have known him over the years.

THE PRESIDENT: I like him personally.

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