

APRIL 22, 1976

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT

BY

DIANE BRANDT

AND

HOWARD CALDWELL

WRTV-TV

WRTV-TV STUDIO

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

6:55 P.M. EST

QUESTION: Well, Mr. President, you are here in Indiana for just a few hours about 11 days before a primary. What do you hope to accomplish in such a visit?

THE PRESIDENT: First, I want to expose myself personally and I want to expose the programs and policies of the first 20 months of the Ford Administration and the programs and policies that we expect to continue for the next five years.

I want a very frank, very candid dialogue between the people of Indiana and myself. I think that is the only way for the voters of Indiana to understand what they are voting for or what they are voting against.

QUESTION: Do you expect to win new votes on a trip like this?

THE PRESIDENT: I would hope so. It seems to me that by personal exposure, an opportunity, say, at Butler Stadium to answer questions of the many, many people who will be there, I am sure all of those who will be there aren't Ford voters to begin with and I hope, certainly, that the answers I give to some of those questions, the personal appearances that I make will be beneficial.

QUESTION: Does this trip to Indiana in any way reflect a concern over the Ronald Reagan strength in this State?

THE PRESIDENT: I was coming to Indiana to build for the November election well before Mr. Reagan became a candidate for the Presidential nomination. I have been in Indiana, as you know, a good many times campaigning for Members of Congress and for other individuals who were seeking political office, so this trip was a part of a long-range program that we had to build for the strength between now and November.

MORE

QUESTION: What do you expect the outcome of this Republican primary to be on May 4?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is going to be close. I always assume any contest is a close one because when you get over-confident you can do the wrong things, so I think it will be close, but I am optimistic that with the leadership we have with the many, many volunteers that we have and with the record and the promises for the future that we have, I think we will win.

QUESTION: Now we have a former Governor, Edgar Whitcomb, and a former two-term mayor of this city, Richard Lugar, running for Senatorial nomination. Do you support one over the other?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think a President of the United States should make choices in a Republican primary for any office. I think that the individuals should compete and should win on their own record or their own personality, so it is not the proper thing for me to do, to get involved in a Republican primary.

QUESTION: Will you be meeting with one or the other or both of these candidates during the time you are here?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not having any special meeting, no. I may meet one or both of them at some function that I will be attending, but I don't have any special plans to meet either one during this trip.

QUESTION: Have you had any pleas or requests or encouragement to support one or the other?

THE PRESIDENT: Not to my knowledge.

MORE

QUESTION: Now, Texas, it has been said that this could be a turning point for you, and if you win there it could all but eliminate Mr. Reagan. Do you agree with that?

THE PRESIDENT: Texas is a very important State, it is a big State, it is very symbolic because it has such an influence on the Southwestern part of our country and it is a State where Mr. Reagan is making a massive effort. He has been there many, many times; he is spending a lot of money; he is making a lot of appearances. So it is a State where he has a big stake.

I think it would be very important from our point of view if we could do well there. We are an underdog, I have to concede that. But, again, we have got good organization, good leadership and we might surprise them.

QUESTION: Now, Governor Connally has taken a neutral position. Is that satisfactory to you? How do you feel about that?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it is. I had several meetings with Governor Connally within the last two weeks. I never asked him for his support and he never volunteered that support in our several discussions. I understand that he wants to remain neutral and I understand he is not supporting either me or my opponent.

I think from the overall point of view, leading up to November it is probably best for John Connally at this point to remain neutral.

QUESTION: Well, are you optimistic that you will pick up enough votes now, then, in the final days and win in that key State?

THE PRESIDENT: I can't say we will win in Texas but we expect to get our full share of those 100 Texas delegates -- it is a little less than 100 -- but, because Mr. Reagan has made such a big effort there, if we get 50 percent that will be, I think, a very good showing for my candidacy, and we are working awfully hard to try to achieve that or even surpass it.

QUESTION: But you don't expect Mr. Reagan to drop out of the race?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a decision he has to make and I would not feel qualified to comment on it.

QUESTION: What about the Democratic side of this election year? Do you think Hubert Humphrey still might emerge as the candidate as some are saying?

MORE

THE PRESIDENT: I said for better than a year that I think Hubert will be the Democratic nominee. I have been surprised how well Jimmy Carter has been doing. If Jimmy Carter does well in Pennsylvania, it will be very difficult for even Hubert Humphrey to be the nominee, but, as I see it today, I think Hubert will emerge. Most everybody in the Democratic Party trusts him. He has had a long record of supporting the party, being a candidate out front, so he is the one that most Democrats know the best and I think basically trust the most. So when you get right down to it, all the rest of them cutting each other up -- and boy, they are doing a good job of that -- in my opinion, they will finally emerge with Hubert as the victor, unless Jimmy Carter does well in Pennsylvania, and then it is a different ballgame.

QUESTION: Do you still prefer Mr. Humphrey as an opponent?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I have ever said I prefer Hubert. I have always said I think he will be nominated. On the other hand, I have said -- and I am glad to repeat it here -- a contest between Hubert Humphrey and myself would be a good contest in the point of view of the voter in this country because Hubert has a philosophy that is different than mine. He believes that the Government should do certain things to a far greater degree than I do. I believe philosophically that the private sector ought to be the way in which we solve our economic problems, et cetera. So it would be a good contest between Hubert and myself philosophically.

QUESTION: On April 21, you said in part that charges that the United States is in a position of military inferiority are complete and utter nonsense. Now, since statistics prepared by the Library of Congress at the request of Senator John Culver would indicate that the U.S. is behind the U.S.S.R. not only in terms of military personnel but in terms of some essential hardware--for example, those statistics would state that the Russians have three times the personnel that we do, four times the tanks, over three times the attack submarines and more tactical aircraft and other hardware--now can we say really that military we are not in a secondary position?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I will not only say it but the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Government don't agree with the assessment that we are number two, and I think they know a little bit more about it than the Library of Congress does.

Now, let's take one of the statistics that is quoted quite frequently, that the Soviet Union has, I think it is, 1,200 to 1,300 ships and the United States has 500.

MORE

I was looking at a chart today, and this is simply an example to destroy the credibility of those kinds of figures -- if you take the 1,200 to 1,300 ships that the Soviet Union has, better than 50 percent of them are patrol craft, off-shore patrol craft that have no strategic or tactical capability beyond the shores of the Soviet Union -- now, if you take that 50 percent away and they come down to 500 or 600, then we are approximately equal.

But now there is one other criteria. Let's move over to tonnage of Navy ships, and anybody who has been in the Navy -- and I spent four years in the Navy -- tonnage is the real criteria by which you judge a navy. If you take all of the 1,200 or 1,300 Soviet ships, including the patrol craft, those little, tiny ships, and add up all their tonnage, it is 2,700,000 tons, as I recall.

The United States Navy, with its 500 ships, has twice as much tonnage, so if you take away these tiny, little ships that some of these statistics include, they were also equal in number, and even if you include the tiny ships our tonnage is about twice of theirs so those statistics can be distorted and, unfortunately, many partisan and nonpartisan politicians are doing it.

QUESTION: Well, another index of perhaps our commitment to defense would be the percentage of the gross national product that we devote to defense. For example, in 1964, the percentage of the GNP that we devoted was 8.4 percent. That has gone downward, and even if there are no cuts to your budget request in fiscal 1977 it will be 5.4 percent of the GNP.

Now, compared to 15 to 20 percent of the GNP that the Russians devote to defense, does this not indicate that our commitment is diminishing proportionately?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me point one other thing out, though. Our GNP total is about twice that of the Soviet Union, so if you have 5-1/2 to 6 percent of U.S. GNP compared to 10 to 15 percent of the Soviet Union -- because our total GNP is twice that of the Soviet Union -- we are about equal. So statistics can be distorted, as some people often want to do when they are trying to make a point.

Now, the point that I want to make is that when I became President 20 months ago there had been a steady decline in the amount of money made available for our national defense programs, because Congress had cut budgets a total of \$50 billion in 10 years. That was a disastrous course of action.

MORE

So in the two budgets that I have submitted for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, I submitted the two largest defense budgets in the history of the United States, larger than any other President did, increasing funds for strategic arms, conventional arms research and development -- the whole ball of wax.

So if anybody makes the accusation that President Ford has treated the Defense Department badly, it is total nonsense, because I am the first President that has added two budgets together individually and collectively that are the biggest in the history of the United States, for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, so anybody who makes charges that I am hurting the military just does not know what they are talking about.

MORE

QUESTION: I am curious about something, Mr. President. Just recently Defense Secretary Rumsfeld said the military advantage is not with the Soviet Union but then when pressed by newsmen he said he stopped short of claiming the kind of superiority you have claimed. Now, isn't there some kind of inconsistency there?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the term that Secretary Rumsfeld uses is rough equivalence. Now that means that in certain areas the United States is stronger than the Soviet Union, and let me tell you where we are. In strategic forces we have better than two to one more warheads than the Soviet Union does, and it is warheads that hit targets. Now the other people say, well, the Soviet Union has more launchers, but launchers don't hit targets, it is U.S. warheads that hit the targets.

The United States ballistic missile program is far more accurate than the Soviet Union. Our ballistic missile capability is more survivable, so between more warheads, survivability and accuracy, we are doing exactly what our Defense Department experts say the United States should do for its own military capabilities.

QUESTION: Your campaign manager, Rogers Morton, said on April 4 that he was sure that Henry Kissinger would not be the Secretary of State beyond the end of the year and you have said that you would like Henry Kissinger to be Secretary of State as long as you are President. Now, some observers say this is a pattern similar to one they allege would apply in the Daniel Moynihan resignation situation. They said there was a pattern of the highest authorities making public statements of support all the while intentionally allowing statements of non-support to undercut that support.

THE PRESIDENT: There is no comparability at all between Secretary Kissinger and former Ambassador Moynihan. Secretary Kissinger feels that he should stay on to complete the jobs that he feels are important in the American foreign policy. I want him to stay on for that very purpose and I repeat on this program that I hope he will stay on and be our Secretary of State because our policies have been successful.

What is the criteria for a good foreign policy? Peace. We have got it. I am the first Republican or Democrat in the last 20 years who could run for election as a President and say that our country was at peace. No other Democrat, no other Republican could say that. So our foreign policy is a successful foreign policy and Secretary Kissinger has had a very significant part in that. And, therefore, if you got something that works, you keep it. You don't get rid of it.

MORE

QUESTION: Well, presumably then he is aware of your wish to keep him. What has he indicated to you? Will he stay?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, he has indicated to me, as far as I know and I know what he said, he is going to stay.

QUESTION: You interpreted your Wisconsin primary victory as an endorsement of Henry Kissinger. Now if you lose in Texas, would that be interpreted as a vote of no confidence?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because the Wednesday before the Wisconsin primary my opponent went on this 30 minute campaign partisan program that he did and he really made Wisconsin the testing ground and we won all 45 delegates in Wisconsin, so I think it was a legitimate test. In Texas, on the other hand, there are many, many other issues. Texas is quite a different State from Wisconsin, so the issues there are not as definitive as they were in Wisconsin.

QUESTION: Speaking of your opponent, you said -- meaning Mr. Reagan -- you said in an interview on national television some time ago, I don't think there is any serious philosophical difference between Governor Reagan and myself on major issues, and then you said I can't use rhetoric to deal with reality.

Now that was a few months ago. Have any major differences on important policies emerged between you and Mr. Reagan, in your view, since then?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think he has brought some up that I didn't anticipate he would because I don't think they are accurate but he has manufactured some of these and so the situation is a little different.

Let me take, for example, the Panama Canal. He, in effect, wants to break off negotiations. Let me tell you what we are trying to do, and President Johnson tried to do it, his successor did, and I am trying to do it. We are trying to maintain that Canal so that it can be operated and it can be defended. That is the objective of our negotiations.

Now Mr. Reagan, by wanting to break off negotiations and stop the negotiations that have been going on for, well, 12 years or more, what he is, in effect, doing is, number one, he is going to certainly precipitate another bloodbath as we had there in 1965 where 24 people were killed and 4 Americans.

MORE

He is certainly going to engender the animosity and the enmity of 310 million Latin and South Americans and 25 Governments down there, and in order to operate the Canal with this inevitable bloodbath, we are, or a President, whoever it is, would have to double the amount of U.S. military personnel down there. Either 20 or 10 thousand more just to protect the Canal so it could be used.

So I think the responsible position to take is the one that I am taking which protects the Canal, its operation and its defense, and the most irresponsible position, the one taken by Mr. Reagan, is that we break off negotiations and just fight it out. I think there is a better solution.

QUESTION: In light of that, do you still consider him a possible running mate as you once did?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I think I would have to understand that the charges he is making are, you know, they are the result of a hard pre-convention campaign. I have been in politics long enough to know that when things don't look too good, you grasp at straws and so I would not hold this against him fundamentally. He certainly would be considered with a number of ten or fifteen others.

QUESTION: The issue of abortion is one that is important to many Hoosiers. Now you said you don't agree with the Supreme Court decision on abortion and that you don't favor abortion per se, but you also don't agree that a Constitutional Amendment is the proper remedy. Now that would leave open the question, it would seem, whether you would favor a kind of States' Rights Amendment to the Constitution on abortion.

THE PRESIDENT: You stated my position exactly right and I appreciate it. I think the Supreme Court decision went too far. I think the regular Constitutional Amendment goes too far, too. And, secondly, I am absolutely certain they can't get two-thirds of a vote in the House or the Senate and three-quarters of the States to approve it.

So both of those answers, in my judgment, are wrong. If you are going to try to get a Constitutional Amendment, the one I would favor is one that would give the option to the individual States to decide themselves either by a public referendum or by legislative authority.

On the other hand, it would be my hope that in the interval the Supreme Court could take a more flexible attitude than they did in the one case which I think went much too far.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for being with us.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

END (AT 7:25 P.M. EST)