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THE WHITE HOUSE

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
WITH THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
GUEST QUARTERS

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE

4:21 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Yes?

QUESTION: Mr. President, I understand that today the Senate passed a bill that would mandate the Federal takeover of Louisiana's grain activities.

THE PRESIDENT: Grain?

QUESTION: Yes.

My understanding is you in the past have said you might veto such legislation. What is your position on it today?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding that the Senate either yesterday or today passed what is called the Clark Grain Inspection Bill. It would totally Federalize the grain inspection service not only at the ports, but in the inland.

I have indicated that I would veto that legislation. I strongly favor an improvement and a change in our grain inspection service, and we submitted a bill to the Congress, we submitted one to the House of Representatives, the Committee on Agriculture, and that bill has been changed somewhat by the House committee.

We will endorse the House committee bill and hopefully in conference with the Senate they can modify the Senate version so it would be acceptable and it would coincide with the House committee bill and the legislation that I recommended.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, there have been conflicting reports it seems to me in recent days and weeks of your attitude toward the Panama Canal. Are you or are you not in favor of the eventual turning over of control of the Canal Zone and the Canal to another Government?

THE PRESIDENT: I do not intend to turn it over during the usable or economic lifetime of the Canal as far as we are concerned. But, let me point out what my opponent has said.

He has said in effect that we should stop the negotiating process that was initiated first by President Johnson in 1965 following the riots of 1964 where 24 people were killed, including four U.S. servicemen. Those negotiations have gone on with the Government of Panama since 1965. They are now in process at this time and the reason we are doing that is to find an answer so that we can maintain the operation, the maintenance and the defense of that Canal during the term of a treaty so that it will be usable by us and by other parties during its usable economic lifetime.

Now, let me point out what my opponent's position is. He, in effect, says that we should stop negotiating. I think that is irresponsible. Let me tell you why.

In the first place, it would mean that we would have a resumption of the riots and the bloodshed that took place in 1964. It means that we would alienate 309 million people in South America, including 25 Governments in South America, who believe that we should make changes in the present set-up in the Panama. It means that with more riots and more bloodshed and the likelihood that we would have sabotage and guerilla activity involving the Panama Canal, that we would have to send an additional 10,000 to 20,000 American servicemen down to the Canal zone to defend the Canal.

Now, this can all be avoided by rational, reasonable negotiations aimed at a long-term treaty that would extend into the next century, and this is the constructive process that President Johnson initiated and I am following at the present time, and I can assure you that we will do nothing that will jeopardize the national security of the country.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what is the status of the Federal Energy Agency? We understand it is going to end in June and its responsibilities will be scattered.

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THE PRESIDENT: I have recommended that the FEA be extended for a period of three years, as I recall. That is necessary for several reasons. One, the Congress passed a 40-month decontrol piece of legislation and some agency has to be in place in the Federal Government to carry out the 40-month decontrol.

Secondly, Congress has passed, at my request, the so-called stockpiling bill of fuel oil, domestic oil, so that if we had another embargo, we would have a reserve that would help us over the hump. Some agency has to carry out the stockpiling of oil so that we have this reserve.

So, I have recommended the extension of the FEA for three years so that we could carry out the responsibility of decontrol and the handling of these stockpiles.

QUESTION: Do you think it will continue?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Congress will pass it, yes.

Yes?

QUESTION: What does the status of the new Government policy on black Africa have to do with your campaign in the South -- Louisiana, Texas and some of the other States?

THE PRESIDENT: Our policy in Africa is the following:

Number one, this country on a worldwide basis has always believed in self-determination for any country, regardless of whether it was Africa or anyplace else. This country, the United States, has always believed in guaranteeing minority rights, and this country has also believed that no country, the United States or any other nation, should dominate a developing continent such as Africa and particularly South Africa.

So, what we are trying to do is to make sure that Africa has an opportunity for self-determination with the protection or guarantee of minority rights and the nondomination by any outside country such as the Soviet Union or the United States or any other country.

QUESTION: Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes?

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QUESTION: Mr. President, on strictly a local issue, Senator Russell Long of Louisiana said last week that he will attempt to use his influence with the White House to block the nomination of U.S. Attorney General John Walters to a U.S. judgeship. What is the situation on this, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding that Mr. Walters' name is now before the Department of Justice for consideration for a potential or possible appointment to the Federal bench. But, that name, nor any other name, has come to me for my approval as far as filling a vacancy in the Western District of Louisiana.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you view your chances in Texas on Saturday? Are your views any different than they were a couple of weeks ago, especially in light of reports that Wallace supporters are saying switch over and vote for Reagan?

THE PRESIDENT: I still think we are underdogs in Texas, but we are closing the gaps and the four days that I am going to spend in Texas I hope will be beneficial. I believe that it would be helpful for us to get as many as possible of independent voters in Texas, as well as Democrats in Texas, to vote in the Republican primary, and the bigger the vote the better it will be for us.

QUESTION: Do you think you can win?

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have a chance to win.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

MR. CARLSON: One more.

QUESTION: Mobil Oil Company was reported yesterday as negotiating with the Vietnamese Government to drill for oil off the Vietnamese coast. What is the Administration's position on this?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a private business venture as far as Mobil Oil is concerned, and we have no official position on that problem.

Thank you very much.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 4:31 P.M. CDT)