

PRESS CONFERENCE NO. 31

of the  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

9:32 A.M. CDT  
April 29, 1976  
Thursday

In the Imperial Ballroom West  
At the Hyatt Regency Hotel  
Houston, Texas

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Won't you all sit down.

It has been great in Texas for the last two days. We are looking forward to a couple more. So, let's get started this morning.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you about what you said yesterday about Mr. Reagan. Does this represent a new turn in the campaign where you and he will take on each other directly, confront each other directly and personally?

THE PRESIDENT: It is not a question of personalities. It is a question of which candidate has the best policies, the best programs, which candidate is the one that is better qualified to do the job, and that is really the issue, what the people in Texas have to decide and what the people throughout the rest of the country must decide.

We have laid out our program, which is a very complete and a very detailed program, both at home and abroad, a program with a record, and my opponent is coming up with some rather simple, some rather lacking in detail answers, and I think the people in Texas must decide it on those policies rather than on personality.

QUESTION: Why do you not refer to him by name?

THE PRESIDENT: That is sort of a tradition you do in politics.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Dick Growald, UPI.

Mr. President, you said you would welcome a battle in November between yourself and Senator Humphrey as providing a clear battle issue of philosophy. What will be the nature of the battle between yourself and Jimmy Carter, especially in view of former Governor Carter saying you failed to provide leadership in all areas?

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THE PRESIDENT: If by chance former Governor Carter is the Democratic nominee, again it will be a challenge between a proven record on my part, where I think we have been very successful in taking a very bad economic situation and turning it around so that we are now on a stable and a constructive road to economic prosperity, and where our foreign policy in my judgment has been one of strength and success. It will be a contest between Carter and Ford on a record and a challenger.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Michael Morgan, KHOU-TV.

When we were up to speak with you last week at the White House, you mentioned that you thought you had closed the gap here in Texas between yourselves and Mr. Reagan. Has this four-day campaign by you closed the gap even more?

THE PRESIDENT: I have been very, very encouraged by the wonderfully warm reception we have received in Texas for the last two days, and I have met with a great many of my volunteer Ford people here in the State of Texas and they are getting more and more enthusiastic.

I find a good spirit and the determination and the net result is I think we have closed the gap. We are making it very, very close, and I am always optimistic. We certainly have generated a lot of momentum that I think could very well give us an opportunity to win.

But, we are working hard, we have good leadership, good programs, good policies, and in the next two days we hope to enhance the possibilities of success on Saturday.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Walter Rodgers, representing the Associated Press.

There has been a perceptible chill in U.S.-Soviet relations. You have dropped the word detente, Secretary Brezhnev's visit has been scrubbed and there is no immediate prospect that the SALT II treaty will be signed.

To what extent has the campaign been responsible for this very perceptible chill in Soviet relations?

THE PRESIDENT: I haven't detected any significant change in the communications between the Soviet Union and the United States Government. We are still working constructively in trying to find an answer to the limitations on strategic weapons.

We are trying to work in every way that I know to keep the lid on any outbreaks throughout the world. We are certainly encouraged by the purchase by the Soviet Union yesterday of 3,400,000 metric tons of corn and grain, which I think is an indication of their living up to the agreement that we signed for a five-year grain sale to the Soviet Union. I don't detect any deterioration in the constructive elements of a relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States.

QUESTION: What you call Mr. Reagan's superficial and simplistic charges, have they done any damage internationally and abroad, and if not, why have they upset you so?

THE PRESIDENT: Because they are not a true picture of our military capability on the one hand and, on the other, they could very well mislead our allies abroad and actually mislead some of our adversaries abroad.

We have a comprehensive, I think a very strong and fundamentally sound military program, and I can take credit for the fact that we apparently are able to reverse the trend that Congress imposed on previous Presidents as to our military capability.

The United States Government, if my military program that I submitted in January is carried through, there won't be any doubt about the strong and effective capability of our defense program in the years ahead, so that the charges made by my opponent, being lacking in depth, overly simplistic, have, in my judgment, at least created some problems potentially abroad because people might believe something that is inaccurate.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bart Cannon, Houston News Service.

Trying to keep up with your campaign around the country, I know you have made some political appointments in primary States before you have gone there, and you have also dropped some grant funds in those States. I am trying to find out if you think the President should use that kind of influence to buy voters?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a completely inaccurate allegation. The business of Government has to continue. We can't stop making appointments, we can't stop agencies from awarding contracts or awards to cities or to States or to organizations just because a political campaign is in progress. The business of Government has to proceed and, under no circumstances, have any of these decisions been made in relationship to any primary.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bill Broom of Ritter Newspapers.

One of the key issues in this Texas Republican primary seems to be whether you are conservative enough, and some newspapermen think they detected a shift toward the right in some of your policies and positions. Will this be a benefit or a handicap to you in the fall?

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THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, Bill, the policies that I have carried out for the last 20 or 21 months in the White House have been the policies that I have believed in in the 25 years that I have served in the Congress of the United States. They are middle-of-the-road policies, both at home as well as abroad, and nothing that I have done, as far as I can analyze, would indicate any shift in my basic philosophy or in the implementation of that philosophy, and I believe that being in the middle of the road, as far as the Republicans are concerned on a nationwide basis, is the right policy, and I know it is the right policy in meeting a Democratic challenger in November.

QUESTION: You are confident you are conservative enough to win in Texas but middle-of-the-road enough to win in the fall?

THE PRESIDENT: I think so, right.

QUESTION: Mr. President, David Glodt with KTRK-TV in Houston,

Why suddenly the attack on Ronald Reagan openly? And secondly, are you saying that Ronald Reagan is in effect not fit to be President of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: When I set forth our defense budget, when I carry out our foreign policy, it is predicated on an in-depth study before we make any decision, where I consult with the best experts we have within and without the Government and those policies have been successful, as I have indicated, and when they are challenged by oversimplified one-liners, in my opinion those challenges have to be met head-on by specifics, and that is what I have tried to do on an impersonal basis and that is what I will do from now on, because this country deserves to know the facts in a complex and very difficult area and you can't take just part of a problem and come to a certain conclusion. You have to look at the broad spectrum.

Now some of those statistics that the former Governor has used are statistics that we use in convincing the Congress to give to the President the kind of a defense budget that I have recommended. But in the process he only takes a very small part of those statistics instead of presenting the total picture. Let me give you an example.

In the strategic area, we have the most accurate, we have the most survivable ballistic missiles in the world and, at the same time, we have far, far more warheads, many more than the Soviet Union has, and, in addition, we have in our strategic forces a two-to-one or three-to-one ratio over them in long-range high-performance aircraft, so what you have to do is to take the total picture and not just a piece, which my opponent has done.

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QUESTION: What about -- do you feel Mr. Reagan is fit to be President of the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, that is a judgment for the voters of Texas and the voters in the rest of the country to decide. It is really a question of which individual is the best qualified to be President and, in that context, I think my record of performance in office is the best judgment that the voters can make, and I think in the final analysis they will make it for me and against someone who hasn't had the experience and the continuity in office.

QUESTION: Bonnie Angelo, Time Magazine.

The Panama Canal renegotiations have figured in the Texas primary in particular. In realistic terms, how important is the Panama Canal to our national defense?

THE PRESIDENT: The Panama Canal is not in the overall context as important today as it was in the past, although it is still a very vital part of our capability to move from the East Coast to the West Coast, and what I am trying to do is to maintain the useabilities of that Canal without hindrance, without bloodshed, without guerrilla warfare and without antagonizing 309 million individuals in South and Latin America. And if we break off those negotiations, we will unquestionably lead to bloodshed, we will have guerrilla warfare, the possibilities of the Canal being disabled, it would be very, very possible, so what we are trying to do is preserve the useability of that Canal ad infinitum, so to speak, so that it will not be lost to us as a part of our economic and military needs and necessities.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Morrison, KTRH-Radio.

I would like to talk about the economy for a minute, if we could. There have been some analysts around the country, also your opponent has said that some of the economic measures your Administration has put into effect are merely stop gap measures and the country could possibly be in a recession in 1977 and 1978.

THE PRESIDENT: Those, of course, are typical campaign scare charges and have no substance whatsoever. We took a very serious economic recession that reached its bottom in April or May, a year ago, and by strong, affirmative, constructive policies we have been able to turn the economy around. We have reduced, for example, the rate of inflation from over 12 percent when I became President, down to less than 3 percent for the first three months of 1976. That is a 75 percent reduction in the rate of inflation. Now, those are trends that are going to continue whether it is an increase in employment, a decrease in unemployment and a reduction in the rate of inflation. Those are solid achievements and I think the Ford Administration can take credit for them and we are not going to have any lapse in the months ahead.

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QUESTION: Then you feel the United States is on the course for a peacetime prosperity?

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Morrison, KTRN-Radio.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Muriel Dobbin of the Baltimore Sun.

You have said you will not rule out Mr. Reagan as the Vice President because of statements he has made in the heat of the campaign, yet yesterday you described Mr. Reagan as superficial, glib, irresponsible and too inexperienced. Should your comments also be read in terms of campaign rhetoric, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think you have to set the record straight. As I said yesterday, the charges he has made for the last month or two have indicated some desperation on his part and the more desperate you get, the wilder the charges, and I understand that. I have been through a number of political campaigns, but you have to meet them head on, and that is what we have tried to do, by pointing out that the United States is unsurpassed in military capability, that the United States does have this tremendous capability industrially, agriculturally, scientifically and technically.

That is the bottom line, not undercutting the capability of the United States.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Raleigh, with KPRC Radio in Houston.

Income tax is something near and dear to the hearts of Americans this time of year. Do you favor income tax reforms and, if so, what would you like to see them become?

THE PRESIDENT: The best income tax reform that I know of is the kind of program I recommended to the Congress in January of last year, where I recommended an increase in the personal exemption for every individual taxpayer from \$750 to \$1,000. That would affect every individual taxpayer. That is the kind of reform that is meaningful, particularly to the middle income taxpayer.

Now, Congress ought to get on with that job. I have recommended for the period after July 1 of this year an additional \$10 billion reduction in taxes, 75 percent of it to go to individual taxpayers, 25 percent to business, so that they can increase their productivity, modernize their equipment and plant.

That is the kind of tax reform that means something to people who want jobs on the one hand and people who want more of their own money in their pockets so they can spend it rather than have the Federal Government spend it.

Now, all these other so-called tax reforms have been talked about for as long as I was in Congress. The way to get the job done is to increase personal exemptions, as I recommended.



QUESTION: Mr. President, Russ Ward of NBC News.

A political question, Mr. President. Hubert Humphrey is reported ready to enter the Democratic race on a formal basis. We would be interested in your reaction to this and then a related question. If Jimmy Carter is the Democratic nominee, as it now appears, how would you propose to go about winning the Southern conservative support that over the years has been needed for a Republican Presidential candidate to win?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not really the best expert on whether or not Hubert Humphrey is going to enter the New Jersey primary or whether by doing that he can stop Jimmy Carter or whether Jimmy Carter is going to get the nomination. As an outside observer, I think the win by Jimmy Carter in Pennsylvania Tuesday certainly gave him the kind of momentum that ought to concern Hubert Humphrey and the other Democratic active candidates.

The only way I can see that they could stop him now is to have a smoke-filled room, broker's convention and I think the public would object to that. So, unless they find some other formula, it seems to me that Carter certainly has the edge at the present time by a substantial margin.

Now, if he is the nominee, I think my overall moderate, middle-of-the road philosophy both at home and abroad will meet the challenge in the South as it will in the rest of the country, and we will keep on that, what I think is a constructive policy, and the voters in the South, in my judgment, compared to someone who hasn't had experience, who has not dealt with the hard decisions in the Oval Office will mean that we can be successful in November.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Ann Broderick, KRBE News.

There has been talk of getting a divestiture bill through Congress this year. What are your feelings with regard to this, and could you support such a bill?

THE PRESIDENT: Any divestiture bill that I have seen I would oppose. I would oppose it for this reason. We have analyzed all of the various divestiture proposals that have been submitted against two criteria.

First, will a divestiture bill reduce the price of petroleum products to the consumers? The answer is no. The divestiture bill would not reduce the price of gasoline, would not reduce the price of residual oil, would not reduce the price of distillates and, secondly, would the bill stimulate more production of domestic crude oil? The answer is no, because divestiture would undercut the capability of the American petroleum industry to go out and explore and drill for more domestic oil and we need it very badly. So, when you measure these divestiture bills by those two criteria, you come to the conclusion that those divestiture bills ought to be defeated.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, good morning.

Tom Jarriell with ABC.

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, Tom.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said several times here this morning that the public deserves to know the facts, and the debate over national defense issues, that Mr. Reagan is using oversimplified one-liners and the issue should be met head-on. Would not the best way to meet the issue head-on be for you and he to share a platform and debate this vital issue, and if one could be arranged, would you welcome a debate?

THE PRESIDENT: It seems to me my proposal for continued military strength, the unsurpassed capability of the United States is a matter of public record and Mr. Reagan's charges, as he has made them in a simple, unverified way, in my judgment, is also before the American people. I think the American people can judge it over a period of time in that way much better than a 30-minute debate on public or private television.

QUESTION: Should you go into the Republican National Convention without the necessary 1,150 delegates reported to you, based on your answer about Mr. Carter and the smoke-filled room, would you then free those delegates at the convention to move and look for another potential nominee?

THE PRESIDENT: We fully expect to have 1,130 delegates by Kansas City time so we aren't considering under any circumstances anything but winning in Kansas City.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Len Hart, of KILT-Radio, in Houston.

All the President's Men is currently enjoying a tremendous box office success all across the country, as well as here in Houston. How will the release of this motion picture, as well as the release of the book "The Final Days" have an effect on the Presidential policies or the Presidential campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: It certainly should have no effect on my candidacy because, at the time I was nominated for the Vice Presidency, I had the most thorough investigation by over 400 FBI agents all over the country examining record from birth on up, and then they got through with their investigation, the Senate Committee on Rules held several hearings, I answered all their questions, the House Committee on Judiciary held hearings, I answered all their questions, I got approval from the two committees and I got an overwhelming vote in the Democratic Congress endorsing my candidacy and indicating without any question of a doubt that I had no relationship whatsoever to Watergate.

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So, as far as my candidacy is concerned, Watergate and all the problems that took place prior to August of 1974 won't affect me whatsoever or my candidacy. What impact it might have on others, I am not qualified to say.

QUESTION: Mr. President, as a man who should know how much of the book "The Final Days" can we take seriously, how accurate is it?

THE PRESIDENT: The only part I am qualified to pass judgment on, as far as I know the book is reasonably accurate. I think, however, that it is in bad taste in a number of cases.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Dave Binder, New York Times.

Following on Muriel Dobbins' and Tom Jarriell's question, why, Mr. President, why, with a man you have described as irresponsible, simplistic and whom you compared yesterday to a donkey -- (Laughter) -- why do you take this man so seriously? Why don't you ignore him? Why do you give him such prominence? Why do you have to meet him head-on?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because the charges in effect could arouse some apprehension in the minds of Americans, could raise some questions with our allies, could raise some questions with our adversaries, and I want to reassure the American people, I want to reassure our allies and I certainly don't want any misconception of our strength and our will as far as our adversaries are concerned. I feel that I owe it to the American people to tell them the truth, to state the facts and to analyze for them as well as I can in these complicated areas the fact that we are strong, that we have the kind of a program that can meet any challenge. I think that is my responsibility as President regardless of any political campaign.

QUESTION: Well, exactly, you would tell the truth and analyze the facts and present them and reassure allies with or without this particular opponent, I am just wondering why you build him up so much?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, because his charges have gotten a lot of publicity and there are a lot of clever one-liners that might appeal to some of our fellow citizens if the facts and the overall picture is not presented to them, and that is what I have sought to do.

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QUESTION: Do you have the impression that any of our allies, or a large portion of the American public, has been swayed by your opponent's charges and rhetoric?

THE PRESIDENT: I can't be sure, and I don't want to gamble. I want the public to know the facts, and I want them to be reassured, and I want our allies to be in the same position. We have to be sure that from the facts the American people can come to the right conclusion, and we can't let any campaigning rhetoric undercut the strength and the will of the American people.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Lou Hanlon, KEYH-Radio.

At the time that you mentioned a moment ago of your appointment to the office, throughout those hearings that were held you mentioned on several occasions that you did not intend to seek re-election. Do you feel that will affect your current campaign or do you feel the public may have forgotten about it at this time?

THE PRESIDENT: At that time, I was simply nominated as Vice President, and under the circumstances, I felt the statement I made was the proper one. When I became President and looked at the possibilities both in the Democratic Party or in the Republican Party, I felt that I was the best person to carry out the effective program so we could meet the economic challenges at home and handle our foreign affairs in the most successful way, and with that feeling I decided that it was better for me to announce my candidacy and to seek election as President for the next four years.

That comment made when I was a nominee for Vice President I don't think will undercut my efforts either in the primaries or in the election leading up to November 2.

QUESTION: Mr. President, John Mashek, U.S. News.

Last night in introducing you Senator Tower seemed to be suggesting that you are contemplating a supplemental appropriation to the defense budget. Are you in fact contemplating supplementals and in what areas?

THE PRESIDENT: We have already submitted a supplemental of some \$300 million, as I recall, for the Mark III production line for the ICBMs and some added equipment that would improve that ballistic missile capabilities.

Now, that decision was made because there has been a slowdown in the SALT II negotiations and that production line was about to terminate under the previous funding, I think, on May 1 of this year.

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Just as added insurance and good economics, I recommended sufficient money to continue that production line for the next six to 12 months, as I recollect. So, that supplemental is before the Congress. In addition, as I said in the January budget that I submitted, we are currently reviewing our overall Navy shipbuilding program.

The shipbuilding program that I proposed to the Congress added 16 major capital ships, but it has been under review for some time and we will get a final answer within the next month or two as to whether or not we should add additional capital ships to our Navy program. If we decide that is needed, I will submit a supplemental.

QUESTION: Would you agree that the Reagan opposition has given you an impetus to get your record defense budget through Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I made the decision in November-December of 1975 that I wanted a 14 percent increase in the defense budget, that I wanted the biggest defense budget in the history of the United States with a \$14 billion increase in obligation authority and a \$10 billion increase in sending for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

Those decisions were made in November and December of 1975.

At that time, my opponent was not a candidate. Therefore, the decision that I made to give to this country the largest, strongest defense budget in the history of the United States was made without any regard whatsoever to the political charges made by my opponent.

The fact that we submitted that budget, the fact that it appears we have been able to convince the Congress to give it to us, I think is an endorsement of the policy and the new Secretary of Defense.

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QUESTION: Bill Vincent, KUHF-Radio at the University of Houston.

Mr. President, your Administration is putting forth to the public that you are reducing unemployment. However, a veteran organization in Washington has reported that unemployment on Vietnam, minorities and young vets is approximately 20 percent.

I want to know, as a concerned veteran, what specific policies and programs you will initiate to eliminate this plight among the men and women who served our country?

THE PRESIDENT: First, the best way to get all Americans back to work is the program that I have advocated where we have added 2,600,000 more employees over the last 12 months, including a number of vets, a number of minorities.

In the case of minorities, we have had for the younger people the full funding of what we call our Summer Youth Program at a cost of about \$450 million for each summer over a four-month period.

In the case of vets, we firmly believe in the GI education bill to get young people better qualified to have better jobs. And we have had in the past, and we are working on it, the program to employ, to get private business to employ vets. The organization is called the National Association of Business, as I recollect -- NAB is the abbreviation of it. They are making a major effort to try and get jobs for Vietnam vets, particularly, and they have had considerable success although we have got to do better.

QUESTION: Just one more question. On the GI bill, do you plan to pass the bill on the delimiting date on Korean vets and, if so, how will 500,000 vets who are depending on this money to finish their education do this?

THE PRESIDENT: The ones who are presently in the education process, I think you can make a good argument that they ought to have the opportunity to continue it, but there has to come a terminating point at some point in the future. We should take care of those who are presently engaged in getting an education. But I think there has to be a terminal point, whether it is eight years or ten years after the conclusion of their military service.

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QUESTION: Good morning, sir. John Cochran, NBC.

Sir, your campaign manager, Rogers Morton, has been quoted as saying you should give some thought to reconsidering Vice President Rockefeller to continue on in that office.

I just wondered if there were any circumstances under which you might say to the Vice President, "Well, you have done a good job, you have been loyal, and I wonder if you would reconsider about your availability and stay on"?

THE PRESIDENT: The best answer to that is that the Vice President wrote me a letter a few months ago and indicated he did not want to be considered as a potential Vice Presidential candidate in the future, and I have seen no evidence of any change in his attitude.

QUESTION: I imagine you could be very persuasive if you wanted him to stay on. Do you think there could be a circumstance under which he would stay, look around at all the available candidates and say, "Well, I think he is still the best one"?

THE PRESIDENT: I would not, under any circumstances, assume that he would change his mind. I have seen no evidence of it. So, until that change takes place--and I have seen no desire on his part to have it change--I think we ought to consider all the other outstanding potential Republican candidates.

QUESTION: So, he will have to make the first move?

THE PRESIDENT: I think under all circumstances that is the proper way to proceed, yes.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Jacqueline Edge for the Highlands Star.

I would like to know, how can the American public expect any President to act as effectively as he should be able to if Congress is made up largely of Members of the opposing political party?

THE PRESIDENT: It does present some problems. (Laughter) On the other hand, in a number of areas I have gotten some good support from a number of Democrats, some here from Texas, some from Georgia. We wouldn't have been able to sustain the 39 vetoes that I have made without the help of some discerning Democratic Members of the House and Senate and, incidentally, we have saved \$13 billion in taxpayers' money by that kind of support from some of the Democrats in the House and the Senate. But, I think to get an affirmative program through, it would be recognized, much easier if we had more Republicans and fewer of the liberal Democrats. The Democrats that I worked with most effectively are the more conservative Democrats, and they have been very helpful. But, we would like to replace some of the liberal Democrats with a lot more Republicans.

QUESTION: Hal Walker, CBS News.

Mr. President, how can you expect to win the State of Texas without the support of such a powerful political figure as former Governor John Connally? What are you doing to get an endorsement from Mr. Connally, and do you expect one between now and Saturday?

THE PRESIDENT: I have had two meetings with my good friend John Connally over the last months. He didn't indicate he would endorse me or my opponent, and I never asked him to endorse me. I think the better way for this primary to proceed is for my opponent and myself to meet head-to-head, which we are doing.

It would also be helpful for a distinguished public servant like John Connally to have his endorsement, but he, for good reasons, has decided not to endorse either my opponent or myself and so we are meeting head-to-head, my opponent and myself, and perhaps that is the best way to have it happen.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Bob Sirkin, from WFAA-TV in Dallas.

More of the Senate Intelligence Committee's findings were released yesterday and they said U.S. intelligence agencies felt they not only had a right to break the law but they had the duty to break the law, and I wonder if you agree with that summation and how these findings will influence your future directives to the CIA?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the directives that I initiated for the total intelligence community, including the CIA, directives that I signed about a month ago, under my directives would not condone any violation of the law and would provide for strict enforcement against anybody in the intelligence community that violated the law.

So I have already taken care of that problem and I think the new CIA, the new intelligence community directives are an affirmative answer to the charges that are made by the Senate committee.

QUESTION: Well, sir, do you agree with the findings of this committee in regard to --

THE PRESIDENT: Frankly, I have not had an opportunity to read the volumes of their testimony, or their conclusions. I have to look to the future. As far as I know, none of the allegations that they made, such as you have indicated, took place since I became President. They may have taken place beforehand, but I can assure you that they will not take place under the directives that I have given to the intelligence community, including the CIA.

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QUESTION: Do you think Senator Tower, then, is proper in not signing the bill?

THE PRESIDENT: It is not a bill; it is the committee report. I have a great deal of respect for Senator John Tower. If he decided not to sign the committee report, I certainly would back him up.

QUESTION: Fred Barnes of the Washington Star.

Mr. President, you mentioned a few minutes ago why you don't use Ronald Reagan's name while you are campaigning. I have noticed there is another name you never mention, and that is Richard Nixon. You mention Lyndon Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower and other Presidents but you only refer to Nixon as your predecessor or even as Lyndon Johnson's successor. How come you won't mention his name?

THE PRESIDENT: It is my judgment that that is an unfortunate era, certainly the period that took place from 1971 or 1973 on, and I think the more that all of us forget that period and the unfortunate developments, the better.

QUESTION: You are saying you are deliberately not mentioning his name?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is better for all of us to just not remind ourselves of that unfortunate period. I do it deliberately.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am Louis Alexander for Newsweek.

Here in Texas we understand that many supporters of Governor George Wallace will cross over Saturday to vote in the Republican primary. If that happens, how do you think that will affect the votes for you?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no way of judging whether that element of the Democratic Party will cross over and vote for my opponent.

I have said that I want all Democrats who believe in my philosophy, who subscribe to the success that we have had domestically as well as internationally, I want them to vote for me and I hope they will. But I have no way of judging how many of the Wallace Democrats would subscribe and, therefore, vote for my Republican opponent. There is just no way I can give you a definitive answer on that.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, Richard Holwill, NPR.

As you know, the key problem over the Panama Canal treaty is the term "in perpetuity." Some months ago, Secretary Kissinger, in talking and discussing the Canal, said that we would negotiate a treaty with an indefinite time period. The Panamanians replied very angrily saying they would negotiate no treaty that disguised "in perpetuity."

This morning you used the phrase "ad finitum." I am wondering if that is a version of disguised "in perpetuity" and what the context of that was intended to be?

THE PRESIDENT: The context was that the Canal would be open to transit by the United States and all other parties, as long as it was economically useable or viable. That was the context in which I used that phrase.

QUESTION: Are you hoping for a treaty which will continue to grant to U.S. authorities police power and other such powers within the Canal Zone?

THE PRESIDENT: Certainly, during the term of the treaty, which we would expect would be 40 to 50 years, which again is the estimated economic viability and useability of that Canal, we would have the right to operate, to maintain and defend it.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. President, John McDonald with KHTV, here in Houston.

Sources in Washington said yesterday that between 50 and 100 Cubans may have arrived in Mozambique and they are training guerrillas for action in Rhodesia. Now, if this is so and it is "a move" by Cuba, are you planning any new diplomatic or military measures?

THE PRESIDENT: We have been assured by all of the African nations that are involved in that part of Africa that they are not interested whatsoever in any Cuban involvement in the problems of that very controversial part of the world. They recognize what happened in Angola where you have 10,000 to 15,000 Cubans. The Cubans with the Soviet backing actually have a tremendous impact on the Government of Angola. And I think most other African nations don't want that to happen. They want their problems solved by themselves without any domination from Cuba, the Soviet Union or any other world power.

So it is our best judgments and knowledge, information, that these countries are seeking to keep out the dominant influence militarily, economically or otherwise by Cuba.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, Ed Walsh with the Washington Post.

Last January Secretary Rumsfeld in his annual report to the Congress said in effect that we already have enough Minutemen missiles and to build more than the 550 we have would not be worth it. That being the case, sir, how do you justify asking Congress for \$322 million to do that?

THE PRESIDENT: If you go back and look at the budget that I submitted in January for the Department of Defense, we said that the Minuteman III production line would close under present plans sometime early this spring. At that time, it looked like we would probably make more progress in a SALT II agreement, and if we had consummated a SALT II agreement, there wouldn't be any need for a further add-on to the Minuteman III production line. That progress has not materialized and on the basis of good economics, and on the basis of good judgment, which we indicated in our budget presentation, we have decided to proceed with the Minuteman III add-on production.

QUESTION: Does that mean, Mr. President, that if there is a sudden breakthrough, a sudden improvement in the pace of those negotiations, you may withdraw that request?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a possibility, but again, we can't speculate to that degree. This is just good insurance and good economics. That is why we have asked for the extra money, and we said we might do it if negotiations didn't proceed as we hoped they should.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very, very much.

END (AT 10:17 A.M. CDT)