

September 15, 1976

POOL REPORT

The President's meeting with students in the Student Seminar in the Michigan Lounge.

The President proceeded in the open end of the "U". There was a group of students sitting in a "U" with the President in the open end of the "U". The President of the student council, whose name I did not get, asked the first question and after that it was every man for himself. His name is Calvin Luker of Ann Arbor. His question was, "I spent 13 months in Vietnam from 1970 to 1971. In view of the fact that your clemency program reached only 18 percent and no candidate has touched on the subject of bad conduct or dishonorable discharges, and in view of the fact you gave Richard Nixon a full and unconditional pardon, how do you feel about a pardon for these people?"

The President said, "I announced a program in 1974. 130,000 persons were eligible. The time was first set to act on January 1. The number who applied was not encouraging. I established a broad-based panel. I extended it 30 to 60 days because the response was not good. A total of 18,000 received pardons or changes of status." He said, "I was disappointed with the total, but all had an opportunity to apply. It would be unfair to those who went through the process to change it now. Therefore, I have no plans to broaden it."

Question: "You pardoned Nixon and you let these people"-- and he trailed off. The President: "I respectfully disagree."

The next question dealt with vetoes. "You are an unelected President destroying the world of elected representatives," the questioner said. The President's answer: "The Twenty-fifth Amendment was followed precisely." He then went into the fact he was investigated by 400 FBI agents and in a searching inquiry into his past he was ratified or approved by both a Democratic Senate and a Democratic House.

He said, "Precise procedure permitted by the Constitution was followed." That, he said, disposed of the second part of the question. On the first one: "I have vetoed 57 (56) bills, or an average of 27 a year. Mr. Roosevelt, when he was President, averaged 55 to 56 a year. Mr. Truman, during his term, averaged 35 a year. I can justify every single one of those vetoes."

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He said that 42 of the first 56 -- pointing out that the 57th(56th) has not been acted on by Congress -- were sustained by the Democratic Congress. "The 57th (56th)," he said, which he vetoed a couple of days ago, "has not yet been acted on by Congress." He said, "The vetoes have had a beneficial impact. The veto as Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Truman used it is to get Congress to stop passing bad legislation."

He then went into his classic example of the housing bill, which he vetoed, and then they passed another version of it, which he signed.

In answer to the next question, he said, "We expect the rate of inflation to go below 6 percent by the end of calendar 1976 and to drop even further in calendar 1977."

He said in 1978 the rate of inflation will be 3 to 4 percent. "This is manageable," he said, "though not as good as during the presidency of President Eisenhower, when it was 1.2 percent, or during Mr. Kennedy's limited tenure as President."

He then talked about the fact that he had recommended catastrophic medical insurance and he said, "If we can't do it in fiscal 1977, we can certainly do it in fiscal 1978."

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In answer to a follow-up question along these lines, he said he was very satisfied with the monetary policies of the Federal Reserve Board. He said they are keeping M-1's-- for all you financial experts-- to four to seven percent. "I am very pleased with the way the Federal Reserve Board has been managing the monetary policies of the country.

The next question dealt with Chicago unemployment and minority unemployment in general. Answer: "Let me take the bilingual program." Questioner jumped in obviously with a very strong Spanish accent. "This university has a rotten bilingual program." The President's answer: "I can't do anything about individual programs. Let's talk about the job programs." He said there are 7.5 million unemployed and 88 million employed, but among black youth, the unemployment rate is 40 percent and far too high. "I may have something to say this evening," he said.

The next questioner dealt with gay people and quoted President Ford himself on the matter of gays. He read a long statement that Ford had made. Answer by the President: "That was an answer I gave at Bradley University before about 8,000 students."

In answer to a question regarding the Abzug amendment, he said, "It is still going through the legislative process and I would be unwise to commit myself to an amendment I have not seen and I have not read." He said, "However, I will not characterize a group unfairly, namely, the gays. I am going to be judicious about it."

Question: "The Immigration and Naturalization Service stops gay entry into the United States. Would you direct the Immigration officials to stop the policy of gay exclusion?" They pointed out to the President that the INS has the power to either exclude gays from admission to the United States, and in fact, they told the President, "At least the INS has the right to deport gays who did not disclose that fact when they came in." Answer: "I was not aware of it. I will have the matter looked into."

Question obviously from a very conservative student who kept referring to the more powerful unions. Does the President recommend breaking up the more powerful unions in view of the move in the country to break up the powerful oil companies? The President's reply: "Just because a union is big does not mean it is bad." He pointed out the Taft-Hartley Act and the Landrum-Griffin Act deal with the problem of unions and union growth and he said, "particularly the Landrum-Griffin Bill deals with abuses within union organizations, themselves."

Follow-up question by the same questioner: "Are unions getting too powerful?" Answer: "It is my judgment that we have got a pretty good balance."

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The next question dealt with mortgages. The questioner said the President has done nothing to help the poor person buying a house, or the lower middle class. It was as though this individual had read tonight's speech. The answer: "An administration cannot bring down prices. You can do something about the rate of inflation but price controls have never worked." He said, "I disagree that this Administration has done nothing." And then he called on Paul O'Neill to come through with a whole lot of figures on public and private housing subsidies. He said, "I recognize that down payments are too high and that monthly payments, in many cases, are too high. If you will listen tonight, you will hear something encouraging."

The next question dealt with tuitions for colleges in the United States, especially with the fact that they are rising steadily. The President went into a long litany of his programs which have helped students, loan guarantee programs, subsidies, and the like. "When I came here in 1931," he said, "the tuition was \$50 a semester for a Michigan resident. I got a loan to go here." He said he could not have gone here, or attended the University, without getting a \$100 loan for his first year. "Now, the rate is supposed to be about \$480 a semester for a Michigan resident, anywhere from \$1,500 to \$1,800 a semester for out-of-State students."

The next question dealt with middle income people having the worst problem. "They earn too much to qualify for public aid. They don't earn enough to be able to afford to send their children to college." He said, "I fully agree that the people within the \$10,000 to \$15,000 category are in a pretty difficult economic status."

On the 13th question -- obviously a women's libber -- asked about the President did not appoint a woman to the Supreme Court when he had the opportunity and what about his commitment to appoint women to the Administration. He went down the list of women whom he had appointed to high posts, Carla Hills for HUD, Betty Southard Murphy of the National Labor Relation Board, Anne Armstrong, the first woman Ambassador to Great Britain. He omitted Shirley Temple. He said, "We have more women in positions of importance in this Administration than ever in history." He said on the matter of the Supreme Court where he appointed John Paul Stevens, "There were two women under active consideration." He said, as an answer to another part of the same question, "And I have supported the Equal Rights Amendment." He said, "If you don't believe me, talk to Martha Griffiths about it." On one day, he said, Mrs. Griffiths came to him and asked him to get 17 Republicans to sign a petition getting the ERA Amendment out of committee and on to the Floor of the House.

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He took credit for getting those 17 Republican signatures. "The measure was brought to the Floor, passed the House and is now before the States."

Question: "How can you then justify your membership in Michi Gamma, one of the most sexist organizations of all which violates Title 19?" The President laughed and said that it is a local problem. He did not realize it was and if it was, he did not think it affected anything Federal.

The 15th question dealt with structural unemployment. He talked about the 17 percent unemployment rate in the construction trades. He said, "There has been no heavy construction going along with the relief from inflation and therefore, there has been no great impact on construction workers. He said, "There has been a significant improvement in the last month," and he said, "once consumer confidence returns, the employment rate in the construction industry will pick up." He said, "There is not enough pick-up in youth and particularly in minority youth."

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The next question, number 16 -- we finally got to it -- the question of abortion. The questioner's premise was wrong. He told the President he had been on the side of State's rights and he had been on the side of Constitutional amendment. Which side was the President on?

The next part of the question, "Would you want your State -- the State in which you live -- to be in favor of abortion or against abortion?" The President: "I favor and I introduced a State's rights amendment. I believe in the good judgment of the people rather than a flat unalterable road blocking."

The President said he introduced such an amendment, the State's rights amendment, in March of 1973 when he was a Member of the House of Representatives, "And I still believe in it. I have said so publicly and I have said so privately. There has been no equivocating on my part. In 1972 the State of Michigan had on its ballot an amendment permitting demand abortion during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. That amendment was defeated by the voters of the State of Michigan by 63 percent to 37 percent. I voted against the proposed law."

The next question dealt with an accusation that the Department of Justice has paid for perjured testimony by witnesses in a North Carolina case, with which I am not familiar and with which the President appeared -- and he said he was not -- not familiar. The lady who asked the question said she wanted very respectfully to draw the President's attention to the case because "a total of ten people are serving a total of 282 years in North Carolina prisons."

The President said he is not familiar with the facts but he will ask somebody on his staff to look into it. He said, "The President has to be circumspect about saying what he is going to do with the Department of Justice," but he will have one of his people talk to Congressman Conyers or Congressman Kastenmeier, who have spoken out on the subject.

The next questioner: "I am a Congressional assistant" -- I assume to Congressman Conyers. The President directed her to talk to Paul O'Neill or Dick Cheney, who were present in the room.

The last question dealt with the Humphrey-Hawkins bill. The President said: "It is poorly drafted legislation. It has the wrong emphasis." He noted that Charlie Schultze of the Brookings Institution and John Kenneth Galbraith -- both of which he called respected Democratic economists -- have opposed it.

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He said, "It puts the emphasis on the Government's control of the economy with emphasis on public jobs." He said, "It would be more harmful in the long run. Our alternative is to give private industry tax incentives, to create more jobs," and in the interim, he pointed out, he would like to help unemployment compensation. He said he recommended extension of unemployment compensation from 26 to 67 weeks during the worst period of unemployment in 40 years.

He said he recommended and went along with 320,000 public service jobs during that critical period and at that point the thing broke up at 4:22 p.m. after about 50 minutes of it, although we have to consult the log to be accurate.

These people did not seem to be ashamed to ask him tough questions. He seemed to enjoy it and enjoyed giving them the answers. It looked a little bit like a warm-up for the debate and, frankly, I don't think any of the questioners in the debate can get as tough as some of the students got, not in the subjects they asked about, but in the way they asked the questions.

I think they regarded him just as an ordinary citizen rather than as the President of the United States, and he regarded them as fellow Michiganders rather than "subjects" of the President of the United States.

I have a very, very weak tape -- because this is a very weak and inexpensive tape recorder -- but if you want anything specific, we can try to get you what you need out of it. Otherwise, you will have to get along on what I gave you.

Q... Was there applause after it?

A There was applause after it.

-- Saul Kohler, Newhouse News