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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

5:20 P.M. PDT

THE PRESIDENT: I just thought we might take a minute to answer some of your questions before we take off for Pittsburgh. We have had a wonderful two days in California, Washington and now in Oregon. We are very optimistic. We think the momentum is going with us. We are going to surprise some people and to stop here in Oregon with Edith and all the others who came forward and indicated their support just makes this stop a wonderful one and a very fine last few days.

So, if you have any questions, go ahead.

QUESTION: Mr. President, are you surprised to be finding yourself running literally neck and neck with Jimmy Carter at this late stage in the campaign, and are you confident of turning it around in one week?

THE PRESIDENT: When you look back before our Convention in Kansas City--where we were 33 points behind nationally and now we are virtually neck and neck--I think we are going to win because we have the momentum going with us. I think it proves the American people support what we have done in the last two years and know that from that foundation we can build a better America in the next four.

So, I am just very, very thankful for the support we are getting from people all over the country.

QUESTION: Mr. President, our Senator was warned that if the nuclear initiative should pass in this State or other ones, that the Federal Government might intervene, we might see the Congress stepping in to tell the States to build nuclear plants anyway. Do you foresee that happening?

THE PRESIDENT: I wouldn't want to pass judgment on anything of that kind. I expressed myself this afternoon that I believe nuclear energy is a very important ingredient in our effort to become energy independent by 1985. At the same time, I fully recognize that we must and we will maximize our efforts to achieve safety in the development and the implementation of a nuclear energy program.

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Our scientific efforts are superb in this country. The best recognition, I think, is the fact that we won seven of the Nobel prizes, the first time in the history of those prizes that one nation had a sweep. As I recall, three or four of those people were nuclear experts. So, we are going to get safety, we are going to have adequate safeguards and we are going to get nuclear power. I think it will be in the best interests of the United States.

There is a young lady back there.

QUESTION: Do you think that a comprehensive health care program is imminent and, if you do, can you talk about what form you think it will take?

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Carter has embraced comprehensive mandatory national health insurance. I think there is a better answer. I feel that the Federal Government with the kind of recommendation that I have made for catastrophic health insurance for the individuals in our senior citizen area, they need catastrophic health insurance, and I am going to get the Congress to do something about it in the next session.

But, I don't think we should federalize health care, as Mr. Carter proposes to do. I don't think that is the right answer. It hasn't worked in the countries around the world where they have tried it on a mandatory basis. I think there is a better answer, and the one I propose is the best one.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could I ask you again the question that I asked you earlier in the day?

THE PRESIDENT: Of course, Phil.

QUESTION: Why have you stopped attacking Jimmy Carter by name, as you were doing just a few days ago, or before the last debate? Have you stopped because you found it was backfiring?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. We found that his programs were not catching on. We found that our affirmative approach was making significant headway, and when you are doing the right thing by talking about programs that the public supports -- peace, restoration of trust and a healthier economy -- the people support it. Why should I bother about the programs the public is apparently turning down that he recommends?

QUESTION: So from now on you are not going to attack Jimmy Carter by name in the rest of the campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to go that far. There may be some slip or some mistake that he is prone to make, and if he does, I will remind the American people of it so I can get the press to do the same.

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QUESTION: But no more of this waffler and all this other business that you were calling him just a few days ago?

THE PRESIDENT: I said we were going to be very affirmative, Phil, and I hope that the American people will do as I think they are doing -- they are going to accept and endorse and embrace the affirmative Ford programs, and the polls show we are doing real well.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on your schedule, I believe you were to meet with a bunch of labor leaders from Oregon here at 5 o'clock. Did you, in fact, meet with them? There were some reports that none of them showed up.

THE PRESIDENT: It is my understanding that for various reasons which you ought to ask them, they were not available.

QUESTION: Did you meet with any labor leaders while you were here?

THE PRESIDENT: You would be very pleased to know, I am sure, that Tom Murphy, the head of the Bricklayers, a week or so ago, endorsed the Ford candidacy. He is the head of the international group.

QUESTION: But you didn't meet with any of the important leaders?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I did not.

QUESTION: Mr. President, the last-minute saturation campaign on TV and on radio that you are conducting, do you think this is a last ditch attempt to gain the momentum that you need, or was this planned all along?

THE PRESIDENT: This was a well-planned campaign, and we followed the program that we outlined after Kansas City almost precisely. And we are now utilizing the legal resources the way we thought they could best be utilized, and I think they are going to be effective, because we have good television advertisements, they are all affirmative.

Our campaign strategy was decided right after Kansas City. It is working, as we have gone from a deficit of 33 points around the country. So, we are neck-and-neck, and we have the momentum, and I would rather win in the fourth quarter than be ahead in the first.

QUESTION: Why didn't you appear with Ronald Reagan at any time during this Far West campaign?

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THE PRESIDENT: Because he had other commitments. I think there was a telegram which I understand --

QUESTION: Some of your aides said they didn't believe that excuse, that they felt that he was up at his ranch forming another party so, if you lose on November 2 he can come out.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, you are in a very disagreeable mood today. (Laughter) And you are such a nice guy. Why are you so disagreeable today?

QUESTION: You don't have any suspicions?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all, because I called him and talked to him the day before and he had a long-standing commitment and he made the suggestion himself.

QUESTION: That he not be on the show with you?

THE PRESIDENT: That he could not break these irrevocable commitments, and he made the suggestion that he would send a telegram, which he did, which was circulated with the press. And I talked to him personally. So, I know precisely what his plans were, how firm those commitments were and he made the suggestion to send the telegram.

Gosh, Phil.

QUESTION: You believe him?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, don't be so disagreeable.

QUESTION: Mr. President, would you be inclined to go to Texas if you had a choice?

THE PRESIDENT: We hope to go to Texas before November 2.

QUESTION: Would you invite Governor Connally to share the trip with you?

THE PRESIDENT: I would certainly hope that he would, and I know from the last trip to Texas that John Connally is doing 110 percent on behalf of President Ford and Bob Dole, so I am confident that, unless he has some other commitments that make it impossible, that John Connally will be on the program.

Can you imagine a better team -- Garagiola, Connally and Green? Man, that will be something.

Yes, Dick?

QUESTION: Did you hear that Jimmy Carter was hiding out down in Plains this weekend?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if he was hiding in Plains, I understand that Helen Thomas found him. (Laughter) I understand she asked him a few very pertinent questions, which I know Helen can be real tough. I am glad she is down there helping his cause.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. President.

END (AT 5:35 P.M. PDT)