

Questions and Answers at

Questions and answers from President Johnson's White House news conference yesterday:

The President: If any of you have any specific questions on any of these subjects—medicare, foreign aid legislation, personnel, civil rights, foreign policy—we will be glad to try to answer them.

State of Economy

Q: Mr. President, on the economy, about six weeks ago you were trying to slow down. Now there seems to be a feeling you have been, perhaps, too successful and you have slowed it down more than you would like. What would your current appraisal be?

A: No, we haven't reached that conclusion. We are studying all the indicators. The Gross National Product is exceeding our expectations, and we are trying to give careful attention to that and every other indicator.

We will have a rather detailed meeting on that this afternoon, and look at our revenues and our expenditures, among other things.

There is some indication that the estimates for this year will show that so far as our cash budget is concerned—and that includes all of our trust funds—we will probably take in more than we will spend.

It appears that we will actually have a cash surplus this year. But there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip between now and January.

Vietnam Discussion

Q: Mr. President, did the Cabinet meeting include any kind of a general discussion or a report from (Defense) Secretary (Robert S.) McNamara on the political situation in Vietnam?

A: No.

Q: Mr. President, were you talking about this fiscal year when you said—

A: This calendar year.

India and Pakistan

Q: Mr. President, can you be any more specific about your discussion about India and Pakistan?

A: No. We reviewed the legislation on the billion-dollar food program area, and the conferences we had with the Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi of India) when she was here.

We were pleased with the progress

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that had been made at Tashkent and the subsequent conferences with the President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of India. We have a new American Ambassador (Eugene Locke) going to Pakistan shortly, and we have had new reports from India.

Our programs are proceeding according to plan, and we think that we have had very fruitful results from our meetings with the leaders of those two countries.

NATO Policy

Q: Mr. President, did you develop any new policy lines on NATO at your meeting today?

A: We had an extended meeting earlier this morning. The full Cabinet did not participate in that. We will be having those meetings from time to time.

Secretary (of State Dean) Rusk will return in a few days from the Brussels meeting and will participate in further discussions with us. In his absence, (former) Secretary (of State Dean) Acheson, Secretary (George W.) Ball, Mr. (Walt W.) Rostow and Mr. (Bill D.) Moyers will be working with their staffs in the NATO area.

Our policies are moving forward according to schedule. It is consuming a good deal of our time, but it is worthy of it. We have a deep interest in that area of the world—in Europe. We are appropriately devoting a good deal of our energies to them.

East-West Trade

Q: Mr. President, did you discuss your East-West trade bill at all this morning, and what might be done to get it through Congress?

A: Yes, we did at our earlier meet-

Session

ing. That is an important part of our program for that area of the world. We are very hopeful that the Congress will agree with us on the wisdom of our proposals and in due time will act upon them.

Civil Rights Bill

Q: Mr. President, did the open housing provision come up at the Cabinet meeting, particularly Senator (Minority Leader Everett M.) Dirksen's stand on it?

A: Yes. The Attorney General discussed the hearings that have been held in the House. He felt that the hearings brought out some very excellent testimony. He is hopeful in due time action would be taken in the subcommittee and in the full committee, and we could get action in the House in a reasonable time.

White House Conference

Q: Mr. President, there seems to be some dissension among the civil rights leaders at the White House Conference on Civil Rights. Are you optimistic that they will come out with something productive from the conference?

A: We always have differences. I think maybe you are inclined not to overlook any of them. Of these differ-

ences, we hammer out a course that will result in making progress in this field—a field that we think desperately needs continuing attention.

We are very hopeful that under the leadership of this council, the 2500 delegates can discuss the pros and cons of various proposals and give their judgments about the wisdom of undertaking them. All of them will be fully and thoroughly considered. We will do everything we can to continue to make rapid advances in the field of civil rights and justice.

I believe there are many more areas of agreement for us than there are disagreement. There are many more constructive things likely to come out of this conference than the little dissension and different viewpoints suggest.

Most of the delegates, I think, realize that there are many problems that must be faced; they have views on how to deal with them. They won't all be in agreement, but I wouldn't get upset about that, or excited.

GOP Briefings

Q: Mr. President, Senator Dirksen seems to feel that the Republicans ought to be briefed on Vietnam. Do you agree with him?

A: I think I am pretty well aware of Senator Dirksen's feelings. He and I are pretty much in agreement. They are being fully informed.

Q: Does that mean you have had a briefing for them, or are planning one?

A: That means I had a rather extended talk with him in the hospital. As he told them up there the other day, I have had another since then with him. We spend a good deal—I would say a substantial portion of our time—either briefing them or you.

Vietnam Elections

Q: Mr. President, in view of the situation now in Vietnam, is it your feeling—

A: We didn't really go into Vietnam here today in the Cabinet. But if you want to spend a little time on Vietnam, if you have a particular interest in it, I will answer your questions.

I am keeping the Cabinet here to answer your questions on the subjects they discussed. If you want to spend time on Vietnam, I will go into it.

Q: I just wondered, in view of the internal turmoil now, do you foresee that elections can go ahead on Sept. 11?

A: We are concerned about the problems they are having out there, but, as I have said in the last two or three statements I have made, we realize the difficulties a nation has in proceeding to constitutional government. We are working with them to bring that kind of government about.

We are hopeful that it can be done

as early as possible. We solicit the support, the counsel and assistance of everybody concerned in helping us attain it.

That kind of representative government is a much desired objective, and we believe that in time it is attainable. We are working very much to that end.

Legislative Priorities

Q: Mr. President, regarding the legislative forecast here, because Congress may want to go home a little earlier this year than last, are you submitting any priority list to them on Administration programs you have?

A: No. We try to avoid that old trap. When you list priority bills, a fellow's bill that is not included might cause him to get upset.

We make our recommendations and express the hope that all of them will be duly considered and acted upon. Of course, a good many of them will be modified and amended, and some of them will be postponed and delayed.

But I think we are making very good progress. We are very pleased with what the Congress is doing.

The last three weeks—I was reviewing this with some of them last night—we passed the assets participation bill, which was very important to us.

We passed the minimum wage bill in the House.

We have some other major pieces of legislation during that period—a substantial step in each direction.

We have our truth in packaging in the Senate now. It's very important.

We have our military construction up in the House today, and our narcotics bill.

So we are making solid progress right on down the road.

We are very concerned about our foreign aid in both the House and the Senate. We have completed our hearings.

I have asked each Cabinet officer to review all of their measures: Agriculture, the Food for Freedom bill and the REA financing; Interior, the various conservation bills; HUD, the rent supplement and the cities legislation; HEW, the Teacher Corps.

We are doing all of that. Most of these hearings are out of the way now. In a good many instances, one House or the other has already acted upon them. Now we will try to move as many of them as we can down the stretch. There is not anything that is a critical emergency, or anything that is in great difficulty that should cause us to panic.

I feel about our legislative program very much like I feel about John's question on Vietnam. I don't think we

should panic because we have some problems.

Politics is never easy in our country—even with all of our experience—and it certainly isn't easy in the midst of aggression like that being waged against South Vietnam. But with reasonable unity and proper diligence—and by constantly keeping in mind our national interest—we will achieve our objectives here and there.

I am encouraged by the progress we are making in Congress, and I am encouraged by the progress the Electoral Committee is making out there—although I don't get to follow its progress in the press as fully and in depth as I would like to. I have to go back and dig up some of the cables from day to day, because the progress that the Committee is making in the electoral developments is not as headline-grabbing as some of the other distressing incidents.

Nevertheless, they are moving forward step by step. While there will be missteps, the direction is sound.

That is about the same way here at home. There will be some missteps, but we are going in the right direction. I think that you will find that the historians will record that you lived in a period when we made greater progress in health, education, conservation and development throughout the world than in any similar period in history.

It is a very exciting time to live in. There are many constructive things that we can all do. I know we all want to.

Optimism?

Q. I assume from what you say that Mr. (Postmaster General Lawrence F.) O'Brien delivered a fairly optimistic report.

A. I don't believe in these "optimistic" or "pessimistic" terms. I would say it is a constructive report, one that shows progress. Probably 35 or 40 per cent of our bills are already signed, and that many or more are already out of the committee and passed in one house.

If you had that kind of batting average when the session was over with, you wouldn't consider it a disaster. We want to make as much progress as we can, and we are doing that. You have to make allowance for certain criticisms.

I picked up the ticker the other day and read, I believe over a period of an hour, where there had been seven real denunciations. When it was added up, it didn't amount to much. At the end of the day, they passed the bill they were denouncing by a rather substantial vote.

There is nothing as dead as yesterday's newspaper, and the criticism. What we want to do is get that legisla-

tion passed.

What we want to do out in Vietnam is to have this Electoral Committee make progress. It may not make many headlines, but if it can bring about constitutional government, we will be very pleased.

In our developments in NATO, Africa, Latin America, in this hemisphere, and India and Pakistan, the Philippines and Korea, and all of those areas of the world, we are encouraged and are proud of the progress that has been made. Mr. Bell reviewed that in some depth today. He pointed out that in a number of countries we have been able to reduce our assistance. He talked of what the future held for us in a rather comprehensive and successful program. It is working.

As I pointed out, in Latin America the growth rate is 2½ per cent, up considerably in the last three years.

We just returned from a visit to Mexico. I had a chance a few weekends ago to spend an entire weekend with the Foreign Minister. He told me never in the history of the two countries did we have a better relationship.

All of the things that divided us, our differences, most of them had been solved—the water salinity, the Chamizal, the various things we had controversy about. We didn't go into great depth country by country today. We discussed these general areas.

The answers are good. The economy is good. The employment is good. The wages are good. The profits are good. The farm income is good. So, as a people, we are doing well. We all have ambitions. We have higher goals and we want to do better, but the reports today were constructive and encouraging.

Tax Increase

Q: Sir, can you say from your review of the economy whether you feel we are moving any further away or closer to a tax increase?

A: I think we just have to study this thing from day to day and take into account everything that is happening. We have to see how much Congress appropriates. We have to see what our revenue is. We have to discuss our expenditures and get good readings on that.

I don't want to make any prediction or do any speculating. You can see the inadvisability of doing that. If I even give the alternatives available to me, someone not really experienced is likely to predict that I intimated something that might affect the market 10 points, up or down. I know you don't want to be a party to anything like that.

The Press: Thank you, Mr. President.