

Excerpts of Session

Following are excerpts from President Nixon's televised question-and-answer session before the National Association of Broadcasters last night in Houston:

Q: You've said repeatedly that you will not resign, and yet today Sen. James Buckley called for you to perform an extraordinary act of statesmanship and courage, voluntary resignation, as he put it, the only way by which the Watergate can be resolved. Would you comment on the import of this statement, coming from a conservative United States senator, and whether it might cause you to reassess your position?

A: Well first, it does not cause me to reassess my position, although I of course do respect [applause]—I do respect the point of view expressed by the senator and by others, perhaps some sitting here, who share that view. The point that I wish to make, however, is that when we speak of courage, if I could address that from the personal standpoint first of all, it perhaps would be an act of courage to resign. I should also point out, however, that while it might be an act of courage to run away from a job that you were elected to do, it also takes courage to stand and fight for what you believe is right, and that's what I am going to do.

... I would not want to leave your question simply with a personal judgment. I'm thinking of the statesmanship which Senator Buckley also addressed. From the standpoint of statesmanship, for a President of the United States, any President, to resign because of charges made against him which he knew were false, and because he had fallen in the polls, I think would not be statesmanship. It might be good politics, but it would be bad statesmanship, and, it would mean that our system of government would be changed for all Presidents and all generations in the future.

What I mean by that very simply is this. The Constitution provides a method by which a President can be removed from office: impeachment. Impeachment for treason and other high crimes and misdemeanors.

Now, if a President is not guilty of those crimes, if only charges have been made which he knows are false, and if simply because as a result of those false charges, and as a result of his falling in the polls, he decides to resign, it would mean then that every future President would be presiding over a very unstable government in the United States of America. The United States and the free world, the whole world, needs a strong American President. Not an American President who, every time the polls go down says "Well, maybe I'd better resign."

Let me give you an example. I've often said to members of the Washington press corps that the most difficult decision I made in my first term was the very last, in December of 1972.

You recall then that I found it necessary because of a breakdown in negotiations in Paris with the North Vietnamese to order the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam, in the Hanoi and Haiphong region, by B-52s. The bombing began. We lost planes. And at that time, I can assure you that not only my friends but many others who had supported the actions that I had taken to attempt to bring the war in Vietnam to an honorable conclusion criticized, and criticized very strongly, what I had done. Great



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newspapers, like The Chicago Tribune, the Washington Star, that had previously editorially supported me, for example, were among them.

And, many senators, as well as other public figures, spoke out. As a matter of fact, one senator said, "The President has taken leave of his senses." Now I had no hard feelings about that, I made him Attorney General.

The day after Christmas, some of my closest advisers felt that because a poll that they had taken privately indicated that I had dropped 20 points in the polls since the bombing began that I should consider stopping it. I considered their advice. I did not take it. I ordered the bombing to continue. I ordered it, as a matter of fact, to be increased on military targets. Five days later, the deadlock was broken.

And as a result of that action, an unpopular action, but an action which I felt was right, the longest war in America's history was brought to a conclusion and our prisoners of war were brought home, as I have often said, on their feet rather than on their knees.

Now I want future Presidents to be able to make hard decisions, even though they think they may be unpopular, even though they think they may bring them down in the polls, even though they may think they may bring upon them criticism from the Congress which could result in demands that he resign or be impeached.

I want future Presidents to be able to take the strong . . . right decision he believes right. That's what I did then, and that's what I intend to do in the future. . . .

Q: . . . I wonder if you would explain the difference between a statement you made last August regarding and what you said at your press conferences this month. You will recall that in August you said you were told that the funds were being raised for attorneys' fees and this month that Mr. Dean had told you the money was to be used for keeping the defendants quiet, not simply for their defense. Could you explain the difference between those?

A: Well, as I stated in Chicago, my statement on March 6 was incorrect insofar as it said that I learned that payments had been made prior to the time that the demand for blackmail by Mr. Hunt, alleged demand for blackmail I should say, since it has not yet been tried, that payments had been made for the purpose of keeping defendants

still. I should have said they were alleged to have been made because as a matter of fact those who were alleged to have made payments to defendants for their defense fees and for their support, Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Mitchell, all have denied that that was the case, they have said it was only for the support of the defendants and only for their attorneys' fees, which would be completely proper.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to say anything further on this point, because these men have a right now in a court of law to establish their innocence or to have established their guilt if they are guilty of whether or not the payments were made for one purpose or the other . . .

Q: . . . You and members of your administration have said that you do not expect the country to go into a serious recession. Yet a newly released Harris poll indicates that a big majority of Americans believe that we're in a recession now. What do you think is causing this illusion of economic recession in the minds of 16 per cent of the people?

A: Because 80 per cent of the people listen to television and radio. No, seriously, I think Mr. Harris' poll is, would probably have been the same last year, in 1972, when we had one of the best years in our history.

But let's look at the situation with regard to recession: what it is now, what it will be at the end of the year, and what it will be in the next year. At the present time unemployment is at 5.2 per cent. Now, that's higher than we would like, but that's the lowest peacetime unemployment we have had in 11 years. In 1961, in 1962, in 1963, the only peacetime years of the '60s, unemployment averaged 5.7 per cent. So, though, on the unemployment front, we certainly are better off than we were before.

Second, with regard to recession. The economy, we would have to be very candid in admitting, has in the past few months and will for the next few months be in a difficult period, due primarily to the energy crisis, which we have been passing through, and to other factors. However, the projections are that as we enter the latter part of the year, unemployment will go down, the price level will abate and by that time I think that the American people will become convinced, I trust they will, that they are not in a recession.

I can only say that in terms of recession there is no greater goal, of course, of any President or of any administration than to adopt policies that will see that every American has a job, who is able and willing to work, and that he is able to balance his family budget at prices he can afford to pay.

Q: . . . You made the statement that to drag out Watergate is to drag down this country. Do you feel that this country would be better off tonight and in the immediate years ahead if the Watergate break-in had gone undetected and that the actions of that group of people had never been reported to the American people?

A: Certainly not. The action was wrong, the action was stupid, it should never have happened, it should not have been covered up, and I have done the very best that I can over the past year to see that it is uncovered. I have cooperated completely with not only the grand jury but also with other investigative agencies, and have waived executive privilege, perhaps further than I should, in terms of the office of the presidency, in order to cooperate. When something happens like this to say, cover it up, forget it, when it is wrong, this of course is completely against our American system of values, and I would very, very seriously deplore it.

I would also suggest, not by way of defense, but I was often criticized after the '60 campaign that I always ran my own campaigns. In the year 1972 I'm afraid I was too busy—the trip to China, the decision on May 8 with regard to bombing and mining in the Haiphong area, the trip to the Soviet Union, the negotiations in Vietnam which brought that war to a conclusion—that I frankly paid too little attention to the campaign.

Now, I don't intend to be in another campaign, needless to say. But I also want to say that if I had any advice for candidates in the future, run your own campaign, regardless of what the press says.

Q: . . . Mr. President, I believe earlier that you said that you had cooperated completely with the grand jury investigation. It was my impression, and I could be wrong about this, but that the record shows that that's not quite the fact, that number one, that the grand jury asked that you come down and tell your side of some stories they had heard and you declined to do that. Number two, that the special Watergate prosecutor, Mr. Jaworski, indicated in a letter to the Senate that he did not get all the evidence that he thought he needed. And I would be interested in hearing you reconcile what I believe is on the record of these previous statements. My basic question is this: that in recent days, you have, in effect, attempted to define the limits of the House Judiciary Committee investigation, what evidence that they have access to. And since the Constitution, and I think without qualification, clearly assigns to the House of Representatives impeachment investigations, how can the House meet its constitutional responsibilities while you, the person under investigation, are allowed to limit their access to potential evidence?

A: . . . First, with regard to the first part of the question, Mr. Rather, when I was—what I was referring to with regard to cooperation was with Mr. Jaworski at the time he handed down the indictments, said that he had the full story on Watergate. You may—you re-

ported that on CBS, I think, as did other reporters, quite properly. Now, as far as appearing before the grand jury was concerned I respectfully declined to do so, and incidentally, I would advise no President of the United States to appear before any grand jury. That would not be in the interest of the presidency of the United States.

Now, if you would repeat your second question so that we can keep our train of thought . . . ?

Q: The second question had to do with the House impeachment investigation. I pointed out that you have sought to limit, to define the limits, of that investigation—what evidence they have access to and what evidence they should not have access to. Now, given the constitutional assignment to the House of Representatives of an impeachment investigation without qualification, how can the House committee do its job as long as you, the person under investigation, is allowed to limit their access to potential evidence?

A: Well, Mr. Rather, referring to the House of Representatives, just like the President it is bound by the Constitution. The Constitution says, specifically, that a President shall be impeached for treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanors. It is the Constitution that defines what the House should have access to and the limits of this investigation.

And I am suggesting that the House follow the Constitution. If they do, I will.

Q: . . . You have referred here again tonight as you have in the past about what you call the precedents of past Presidents in withholding White House materials from the House Judiciary Committee. But other Presidents protecting the confidentiality of their conversations were not the subject of impeachment investigations, Mr. President, and in fact many of them wrote that the House Judiciary Committee and at least Congress have the right to demand White House materials in the course of the impeachment investigation.

And history shows that Andrew Johnson gave up everything that the Congress asked him for when he was the subject of an impeachment investigation. So, Mr. President, my question is this: aren't your statements to that matter historically inaccurate, or at least misleading?

A: . . . It is true what you say that the only other President who was exposed to an impeachment investigation was Andrew Johnson. And insofar as that particular part of your question is concerned, you are correct. However, insofar as the principle of confidentiality is concerned, that principle still stands. And it affects an impeachment investigation as well as any other investigation, because in the future if all that a Congress under the control of an opposition party had to do in order to get a President out of office was to make an unreasonable demand to go through all the files of the presidency, a demand which a President would have to refuse, then it would mean that no President would be strong enough to stay in office to resist that kind of demand and that kind of pressure. It would lead to instability, and it would destroy, as I have indicated before, the principle of confidentiality.

With regard to the problem, I simply want to say this: It is difficult to find a proper way to meet the demands of the Congress. I'm trying to do so and trying to be as forthcoming as possible. But I also have another responsibility. I must think not of myself, but I must think also of future Presidents of this country, and I am not going to do anything and I am not going to give up to any demand that I believe would weaken the presidency of the United States. I will not participate in the destruction of the office of the President of the United States while I am in this office.