

Transcript of President's News Conference

(INCOMPLETE) (SEE NOTE AT END)
 Following is a transcript of President Ford's broadcast news conference from the White House last night as recorded by The New York Times:

OPENING STATEMENT

PRESIDENT FORD: Will you please sit down?

Ladies and gentlemen, this press conference is being held at a time when many Americans are observing the Jewish religious New Year. It begins the period of self-examination and reconciliation. In opening this press conference, I am mindful that the spirit of this holy day has a meaning for all Americans.

In examining one's deeds of the last year and in assuming responsibility for past actions and personal decisions, one can reach a point of growth and change. The purpose of looking back is to go forward with a new and enlightened dedication to our highest values.

The record of the past year does not have to be endlessly relived but can be transformed by commitment to new insights and new actions in the year to come.

QUESTIONS

Reason for Pardon

Q. Mr. President, some Congressional Republicans who have talked to you have hinted that you may have had a secret reason for granting President Nixon a pardon sooner than you indicated you would at the last news conference, and I wondered if you could tell us what that reason was?

A. From the outset, let me say, I had no secret reason and I don't recall telling any Republican that I had such a reason.

Let me review quickly, if I might, the things that transpired following the last news conference.

As many of you know, I answered two, maybe three, questions concerning a pardon at that time. On return to the office, I felt that I had to have my counsel undertake a thorough examination as to what my right of pardon was under the Constitution. I also felt that it was very important that I find out what legal actions, if any, were contemplated by the special prosecutor.

That information was found out and it was indicated to me that the possibility exists, a very real possibility, that the President would be charged with obstructing justice and 10 other possible criminal actions.

In addition, I asked by general counsel to find out, if he could, how long such criminal proceedings would take from the indictment, the carrying out of the trial, etc. And I was informed that this would take a year, maybe somewhat longer, for the whole process to go through.

I also asked my counsel to find out whether or not under decisions of the judicial system a fair trial could be given to the former President.

After I got the information, which took two or three days, I then began to evaluate in my own mind whether or not I should take the action which I subsequently did.

Miss Thompson.

2. Nixon's Guilt

Q. Throughout your Vice-Presidency you said you didn't believe that former President Nixon had ever committed an impeachable offense. Is that still your belief or do you believe that his acceptance of a pardon implies his guilt; or is it an admission of guilt?

A. The fact 38 member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, Democrat

SEPTEMBER 17, 1974

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Domestic Matters

and Republican, have unanimously agreed in the report that was filed that the former President was guilty of an impeachable offense I think is very persuasive evidence. And the second question—don't—Was the acceptance of the pardon by the President an admission of guilt. The acceptance of a pardon I think can be construed by many if not all as an admission of guilt.

I have asked Dr. Lukash, who is head physician in the White House, to keep me posted in proper channels as to the former President's health.

I have been informed, on a routine day-to-day basis, but I don't think I'm

at liberty to give any information as to those reports that I have received.

You also asked what impact did the President's health have on my decision. I think it's well known that just before I gave my statement at the time I gave the pardon, I personally wrote in a phrase, the threat to the President's health.

The main concern that I had at the time I made the decision was to heal the wounds throughout the United States. For a period of 18 months or longer, we had had turmoil and divisiveness in the American society.

At the same time, the United States had major problems—both at home and abroad—that needed the maximum personal attention of the President and many others in the government.

It seemed to me that as long as this divisiveness continued, this turmoil existed, caused by the charges and countercharges the responsible people in the Government could not give their total attention to the problems that we had to solve at home and abroad. And the net result was I was more anxious to heal the nation. That was the top priority. And I felt then, and I feel now, that the action I took will do that.

I couldn't be oblivious however to news accounts that I had concerning the President's health, but the major reason for the action I took related to the effort to reconcile divisions in our country and to heal the wounds that had festered far too long.

3. Timing of Pardon

Q. Mr. President, after you had told us that you were going to allow the legal process to go on before you'd decide whether to pardon him, why did you decide on a Sunday morning abruptly to pardon President Nixon?

A. I didn't decide abruptly. I explained a moment ago the process that I went through subsequently to the last press conference. And when I had assembled all of that information that came to me through my counsel, I then most carefully analyzed the situation in the country. And I decided that we could not afford in America an extended period of continued turmoil.

And the fact that the trial would have—and all the part thereof—would

have last a year, perhaps more, with the continuation of the divisions in America, I felt that I should take the action that I did, promptly and effectively.

4. Custody of Tapes

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to ask you a question about the decision relating to custody of the Nixon tapes and documents. Considering the enormous interest that the special prosecutor's office has in those documents for further investigation, I'm wondering why the negotiations with Mr. Nixon's representatives were conducted strictly between the counsel in your office without bringing in discussions with either Mr. Jaworski's representatives or those from the Justice Department?

A. Well, in the first place I did receive a memorandum, a legal opinion, from the Department of Justice which indicated that in the opinion of the Department of Justice the documents, tapes, were the—ownership of them were in the hands of the former President. And historically that has been the case for all Presidents.

Now the negotiations for the handling of the tapes and documents were undertaken and consummated by my staff and the staff of the former President, and I believe that they have been properly preserved, and they will be available under subpoena for any criminal proceeding.

The special prosecutor's staff has indicated some concern. I am saying tonight that my staff is working with the special prosecutor's staff to try and alleviate any concerns that they have, and I hope a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out.

5. Public View of Pardon

Q. Mr. President, during your confirmation hearings as Vice President you said that you did not think that the country would stand for a President to pardon his predecessor. Has your mind changed about such public opinion?

A. In those hearings before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration I was asked a hypothetical question, and in answer to that hypothetical question I responded by saying that I did not think the American people would stand for such an action.

Now that I'm in the White House and don't have to answer hypothetical questions but have to deal with reality, it was my judgment after analyzing all of the facts that it was in the best interest of the United States for me to take the action that I did. I think if you'll re-read what I said in answer to that hypothetical question I did not say I wouldn't, I simply said that under the way the question was phrased the American people would object. But I'm absolutely convinced when dealing with reality in this very, very difficult situ-

ation that I made the right decision in an effort, an honest conscientious effort to end the divisions and the turmoil in the United States.

6. Safety of Tapes

Q. Mr. President, is there safeguard in the tapes agreement that was made with Mr. Nixon to prevent their destruction in the event anything happens to him because under the agreement they will be destroyed and secondly should not the tapes be kept in the White House for the special prosecuting attorney's use?

A. The tapes and the documents are still in our possession and we are, as I said a moment ago, working with the special prosecutor's office to alleviate any concerns they have as to their disposition and their availability. The agreement as to destruction is quite clear cut. As long as Mr. Nixon is alive and during the period of time as set forth they are available for subpoena by a court involving any criminal proceedings. I think this is a necessary requirement for the protection of evidence for any such action.

7. Intelligence Activities

Q. Mr. President, recent Congressional testimony has indicated that the C.I.A., under the direction of a committee headed by Dr. Kissinger, attempted to destabilize the Government of Chile under former President Allende. Is it the policy of your Administration to attempt to destabilize the governments of other democracies?

A. Let me answer in general—I think this is a very important question.

Our Government, like other governments, does take certain actions in the intelligence field to help implement foreign policy and protect national security.

I am informed reliably that Communist nations spend vastly more money than we do for the same kind of purposes.

Now, in this particular case, as I understand it and there's no doubt in my mind, our Government had no involvement in any way whatsoever in the coup itself.

In a period of time, three or four years ago, there was an effort being made by the Allende Government to destroy opposition news media, both the writing press as well as the electronic press. And to destroy opposition political parties.

And the effort that was made in this case was to help and assist the preservation of opposition newspapers and electronic media and to preserve opposition political parties.

I think this is in the best interest of the people in Chile, and certainly in our best interest.

Now, may I add one further comment.

The 40 Committee was established in 1948. It has been in existence under Presidents since that time. That committee reviews every covert operation undertaken by our Government.

And that information is relayed to the responsible Congressional committees where it is reviewed by House and Senate committees. It seems to me that the 40 Committee should continue in existence and I am going to meet with the responsible Congressional committees to see whether or not they want any changes in the review process so that the Congress as well as the President are fully informed and are fully included in the operations for any such action.

8. Reaction to Pardon

Q. In view of public reaction, do you think that the Nixon pardon really

serves to bind up the nation's wounds? I wonder if you would assess public reaction to that move?

A. I must say that the decision has created more antagonism than I anticipated, but as I look over the long haul with a trial or several trials of a former President, criminal trials, the possibility of a former President being in the dock so to speak, and the divisions that would have existed not just for a limited period of time but for a long period of time, it seems to me that when I had the choice between that possibility and the possibility of taking direct action hoping to conclude it, I'm still convinced despite the public reaction so far that the decision I made was the right one.

9. Understanding on Pardon

Q. Mr. President, in regard to the pardon you talk about the realities of the situation. Well those realities, rightly or wrongly, include a good many people who speculate about whether or not there is some sort of arrangement. They even, some of them, call it a deal between you and the former President or between your staff and his staff—resignation in exchange for a full pardon. The question is, is there or was there, to your knowledge, any kind of understanding about this?

A. There was no understanding, no deal, between me and the former President, nor between my staff and the staff of the former President—none whatsoever.

10. Tax Returns

Q. Sir, there is a bill that the Treasury Department has put forward—I think it's about 38 pages. Under this bill which deals with getting hold of the returns—Internal Revenue returns—of citizens of the country, you could take action to get those returns whenever you wanted to. I wonder if you are aware of this, and if you feel you need to get those returns of citizens?

A. It's my understanding that a President has, by tradition and practice and by law, the right to have access to income tax returns. I personally think that is something that should be kept very closely held. And it—a person's income tax return is a very precious thing to that individual. And therefore I am about to issue an Executive order that makes it even more restrictive as to how those returns can be handled.

And I do think that a proposed piece of legislation that's coming to me and subsequently will be submitted, as I recollect, to the Congress would also greatly tighten up the availability or acceptability of income tax returns. I think they should be closely held and I assure you that they will be most judiciously handled as far as I am concerned. Yes?

11. Presidential Papers

Q. Mr. President: Looking beyond the Nixon papers and in view of some criticism in Congress, do you believe we may have now reached the point where Presidential White House papers should remain in the Government's hands as the property of the Government?

A. As far as I'm personally concerned, I can see a legitimate reason for Presidential papers remaining the property of the Government. In my own case I made a decision some years ago to turn over all of my Congressional papers, all of my Vice-Presidential papers to the University of Michigan archives. As far as I'm concerned whether they go to the archives for use or whether they stay the possession of the Government, I don't think it makes too much difference. I have no desire personally to retain whatever papers come out of my Administration.

12. Conflict of Interest

Q. Mr. President, at the last press conference you said the code of ethics that will be followed "will be the ex-

ample that I set." Do you find any conflicts of interest in the decision to grant a sweeping pardon to your lifelong friend and your financial benefactor with no consultation for advice on judgment or the legal fallout?

A. Well, the decision to grant a pardon to Mr. Nixon was made primarily as I have expressed for the purpose of trying to heal the wounds throughout the country between Americans on one side of the issue or the other. Mr. Nixon nominated me for the office of Vice President. I was confirmed overwhelmingly in the House as well as in the Senate. Every action I've taken is predicated on my conscience without any concern or consideration as to favor as far as I'm concerned.

13. Conditional Amnesty

Q. If your intention was to heal the wounds of the nation, Sir, why did you grant only a conditional amnesty to the Vietnam war draft evaders while granting a full pardon to President Nixon?

A. Well, the only connection between those two cases is the effort that I made in the one to heal the wounds involving the charges against Mr. Nixon and my honest and conscientious effort to heal the wounds for those who had deserted military service or dodged the draft. Thus the only connection between the two: In one case you have a President who was forced to resign because of circumstances involving his Administration and he has been shamed and disgraced by that resignation.

In the case of the draft dodgers and Army and military deserters, we are trying to heal the wounds by the action that I took with the signing of the proclamation this morning.

The remainder of the transcript was unavailable and will appear in later editions.