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Washington Week in Review

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Paul Duke, moderator

Peter Lisagor, Chicago Daily News

Charles Corddry, Baltimore Sun

Neill MacNiell, Time

William Hines, Chicago Sun-Times

Duke:Let me turn you to another matter, Peter, and that is the announcement that Mr. FORD'S PREDECESSOR, Richard Nixon, is going to take a trip to China. How was this received at the White House ?

Lisagor: A kind of stricken reception. They, the Chinese, came in Thursday afternoon [Feb. 5] at 3 o'clock with an announcement they said they would make in Peking at 8 o'clock Friday morning. And then Mr. Nixon called Brent Scowcroft, who is the President's (garbled word) for national security affairs, said he wanted to speak to the President, the President wasn't available. They finally got together and spoke for 16 minutes, in which the President is ALLEGED [Lisagor's emphasis] to have said that he was encouraged to know that the former President's health has improved enough for him to make the trip, and would he please give the Chinese leaders his best wishes. In 16 minutes, that's all they are reported to have said. Now let me just explain why they are somewhat unhappy about this trip at the White House, despite this, you know, their public posture on it. They are afraid that it evokes memory of the pardon and all that -- the consequences of that. It comes three days before the New Hampshire primary. The Chinese are sending in a plane. The State Department is working on getting clearance for that plane. And they claim that there is just not connection between this trip and the government. It's probably true, but they're going to have a hard time making a case for it. And, they're just worried about the timing of it, they're not very happy about it at all.

MacNiell: Peter, let me ask you about another part of this. First, why is Nixon going, and why did the Chinese invite him ?

Lisagor: The Chinese regard Richard Nixon really as a great American. I heard a story today which illustrates this point. Somebody said, don't you feel badly that it was Richard Nixon who discovered China ? -- to a Chinese representative here, and Mao is supposed to say, according to the Chinese: Mao says there are two sides to every man, a bad side and a good side; You got the bad side, we got the good side. [laughter] But the answer to the second question is that Mr. Nixon is going along the road to rehabilitation, as he can promote it, and as he can do it and manage it. I think this is one of the early steps along that road. Its political fallout is, you know, kind of questionable, but it just brings up the Nixon issue again, and one thing I must add is that I don't know how the Nixon issue cuts with Ronald Reagan. I think that his position visavis Nixon is probably the same as President Ford's, he'd like to put as much distance as he could..... [Here Macniell interrupts with a question about Ford's stand on the abortion issue] [end item]

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