

Exchange With Reporters in Chautauqua, New York

October 4, 1996

Middle East Peace Process

The President. Good morning, everyone.

Q. Is Christopher going to the Middle East this weekend, Mr. President?

The President. It's entirely possible. I—we discussed it, and I think he's probably finalized his plans by now. I told him that I wanted him to go there for the beginning of the talks, which start, as you know, on Sunday morning. And he's supposed to go to Africa and I asked him not to cancel the trip to Africa but to go to the Middle East first. So I'm assuming that those plans were made and that he'll be there in the beginning.

Presidential Debate

Q. Mr. President, how's the debate training going, sir? And what makes you think you need much training after all the speeches you make and the news conferences you've been through over the last 4 years?

The President. Debates are different, because it's not just answering tough questions. You—basically, there's the person you're debating, the other candidate, plus the interlocutor, plus the time constraints, so that really I'm—Senator Mitchell won last night. [Laughter] I am badly out of shape on this, but I'm trying to get better. And I woke up this morning and sort of massaged my bruises, and I'm ready to go at it again. [Laughter]

Q. When Mr. Dole asks you whether you're going to give Whitewater pardons and why your administration has been clouded by ethical problems, what will your response be?

The President. Well, tune in tomorrow. I'm going to answer the same thing I have already. There aren't any under consideration, and I haven't given any thought to giving any. That's not the issue. I just said I think that nobody should be singled out for special treatment one way or the other, including discrimination against them or discrimination in favor of them. There's a procedure for that that everyone follows, and there is absolutely no consideration being given to that.

Q. Sir, they tell us they are going to——

Q. Mr. President, do you expect Senator Dole to go on the attack? Do you expect Senator——

Q. ——tell us that they're going to help you, in that sense, control your temper if you should get some of these. Is that a problem for you, do you think?

The President. No, but I think—what we do often is I give the answer I'd like to give, and then I go back and give the answer I should give if somebody takes a real broadside at me. [Laughter] No, we're—I think the most important thing is to remember that this debate is as much about the American people and their lives and their future as it is about Senator Dole and me. And so, what I want to be able to do—and my objectives are fairly straightforward and basically quite simple—I want to make sure that the voters know what the record is, they know what the contrasts are between Senator Dole and me, and most important of all, that they know what I intend to do for the next 4 years. And then they can make up their own minds.

I think my goal here is to make sure that the people actually get something out of this debate other than just sort of an exercise in who does a better job in outwitting someone else. That's—I think it ought to be something that's genuinely informative, and I'm going to try to make it that way.

Press Secretary Mike McCurry. Thank you, Mr. President.

Q. Mr. President, the polls being the way they are, a lot of people are wondering how much importance this debate really is. What do you think?

The President. Oh, I think it's quite important. I think the American people care a lot about their country. I think they know we're going through a period of real, profound change, and that these decisions we're going to make in the next couple of years will affect our country well into the 21st century.

Q. Do you think you're going to carry western New York, Chautauqua country, if you will?

The President. I hope so. I've met some awful nice people here who say they're working for us up here and trying to help us win here. It's unusual, as you know, for a Demo-

crat to carry here, but I'm hoping we will, and I feel pretty good about it.

Q. Senator, is the President low-balling us when he tells us you beat him yesterday?

Senator George Mitchell. Well, I'll say——

The President. Tell the truth, George. You beat me like a drum. [*Laughter*] You kicked me all over the place last night. Tell the truth.

Senator Mitchell. Well, let me say this. I served as majority leader in the Senate for 6 years while Senator Dole was minority leader, so I debated him probably more than any other person, and I know just how effective he is. Senator Dole is a highly skilled debater, and I think he's going to be tough in this debate coming up on Sunday. But the President, I think, will do all right.

Q. Mr. President, what do you remember most from the debates 4 years ago? What sticks out in your mind—the last time you went through this?

The President. Oh, no question about it, the townhall debate, the citizens debate, and the richness and variety and the relevance of the questions that the citizens asked, and how little they were into politics and positioning and how much they were into the substance of their own lives and the future. I was very, very impressed by the questions that the American people asked who were part of that debate. That's the thing I will always remember.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:30 a.m. outside the Hotel Athenaeum. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

September 28

In the morning, the President traveled from Houston, TX, to Providence, RI, arriv-

ing in the afternoon. Later, he made a conference call from the Westin Hotel to African Americans for Clinton/Gore '96. He then attended the Democratic National Committee reception for Representative Jack Reed at the Westin Hotel.

In the evening, the President traveled to Fall River and Boston, MA. Later, he attended a Democratic National Committee reception and dinner at the Meridian Hotel in Boston. After midnight, the President returned to Washington, DC.

September 29

In the morning, the President had telephone conversations with House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt, and Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle concerning his effort to arrange a Middle East summit meeting at the White House.

In the afternoon, The President had telephone conversations with Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and King Hussein I of Jordan inviting them to a summit meeting at the White House.

September 30

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Mubarak of Egypt concerning the situation in the Middle East and Mr. Mubarak's inability to attend a summit meeting at the White House.

The President announced his intention to nominate Letitia Chambers to be a Representative, and James C. Hormel and Prezell R. Robinson to be Alternate Representatives to the 51st session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jane Lubchenco to the National Science Board, National Science Foundation.

The President declared a major disaster in South Carolina and ordered Federal aid to supplement recovery efforts in the areas struck by severe winds and flooding associated with Hurricane Fran on September 4 and continuing.