

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
CONGRESSMAN JOHN J. RHODES
CHAIRMAN OF THE PLATFORM COMMITTEE
AUGUST 13, 1972

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press and Guests:

Thank you very much for being here this afternoon.

To begin with, I have an announcement to make which will change the schedule for those persons who are to appear before the Platform Committee and the Full Committee sessions on Tuesday. Those of you who saw "Face the Nation" presentation will recall that there was a question raised as to why Secretary Romney was not testifying before the Full Committee. Actually the question came from left field as far as I was concerned because I had no inkling that there were any rumors of disagreement or anything like this regarding Secretary Romney and after it was over I got in contact with Secretary Romney's people and asked him if he would, in order to dispel any rumors like that, change his time of testimony so that he would testify before the Full Committee on Tuesday instead of the Subcommittee and he has agreed to do that, so Secretary George Romney will be testifying on Tuesday morning.

Four years ago the Platform Committee of the Republican National Convention met in this same room to begin its deliberations. The status of the country was much different at that time. There was war in the streets of our cities. Parts of our nation's capitol had been burned to the

ground and lawlessness was rampant. And in Vietnam we were building up to more than half a million American fighting men to protect that country.

Today things are different. Calm has returned to our cities. In 53 of the 156 cities with over 100,000 population serious crimes actually decreased in numbers last year. Two days ago the last American ground combat unit in Vietnam - the Third Battalion, 21st Infantry - was deactivated and is leaving that country. Our President has journeyed to Moscow and Peking in the cause of peace.

The Platform that will be written here in Miami Beach will certainly reflect the accomplishments of the past three and a half years of the Nixon Administration. More importantly, it will serve as a blueprint for four more years of Republican leadership under President Nixon.

This year we have done everything possible to involve Americans of all strata in our society - senior citizens, businessmen, labor leaders, youth, minority groups, educators, people from all walks of life - in the process of drafting our Platform. We have reached some 60,000 people through a questionnaire. We asked this cross section of Americans what they felt the priorities of this country should be in the years ahead. The results of this questionnaire have been made available to our Platform Delegates.

Another step has been to bring to the make-up of the Platform Committee a diversity of backgrounds and balanced presentation. The make-up of the 14 chairmen and co-chairmen of the seven subcommittees who will guide our deliberations shows that this has been done.

This group includes an eighteen year old student from Las Vegas, Nevada, two United States Senators, four Congressmen, the Mayor of Columbus, Georgia, the Lieutenant Governor of Iowa and five women. The women include two blacks, a candidate for the United States Senate from West Virginia, a state senator from Vermont and a twenty-one year old college graduate.

The Platform Committee of the Republican Party is the one place where women have had equal rights for a long time. It was back in 1944 that the Convention adopted the "equal representation clause." Since that time each state and territory has been required to appoint "one woman" and "one man" to the Platform Committee.

Our effort to get wider citizen participation in drafting this Platform has led us to schedule for appearances before the Committees of the Platform Committee an unprecedented number of individuals and organizations. More than 300 people will testify during the most extensive series of public hearings ever held by the Republican Party. Everyone is being given a chance to be heard.

Now I'd like to emphasize one point. We have brought here to Miami Beach a working draft of the Platform. This is normal procedure. It would be foolhardy to think that we could assemble such a document in a week's time unless we had done some preliminary work and we have done a lot of preliminary work. After listening to the witnesses the Full Committee will begin to review the document line by line and amendments will be offered and amendments will be disposed of. The final document will be the product of the Full Platform Committee after it has heard all the various viewpoints that will be presented during our three and a half days of hearings. The finished Platform will probably bear a resemblance, we hope a very close resemblance, to the working draft. But the final version will be shaped and approved by the delegates. It will be their document and it will bear their imprint, and their imprint alone.

One other thing - this working draft was not written by the White House. It has been reviewed by a White House staff and some suggestions have been made. It has been reviewed by all members of the Cabinet - everyone - or by their representatives - and some suggestions have been made. But the document has been assembled and written by the Platform Committee after consultation with all the Cabinet Officers, and all of the ranking Republicans in the Congress and Republican experts in specialized fields.

Now, before I yield to questions, I would like to mention a matter which I eluded to in the "Face the Nation" program that time didn't allow me to elaborate upon and that is the posture of the Democratic Party by its candidate insofar as defense is concerned. There have been various proposals put forth by the candidate and by the Platform, most of them having to do with the \$30,000,000 cut in defense spending. This cut would, as they say, result in several things. Only one of them is the cancellation of the V-1 bomber which is the only manned bomber which we have in prospect. Only one of them is the cancellation of the Trident System. Even more importantly, I think, is the cutting down of the carrier task force which we would halve the aircraft carriers of the Navy from 16 to 6. And I only have one point to make along these lines. Vietnam is being wound down, but there are many other areas of tension in the world today. One of the main ones is the Middle East. One of the reasons why the Middle East situation is better now than it was four years ago is because of the force which we have been able to maintain in the Mediterranean and which we have been able to maintain in Europe. The suggestion of the Democratic candidate would have the effect of taking practically every aircraft carrier, probably there would not be an aircraft carrier stationed full time in the Mediterranean, and would also have the result of taking troops out of Europe to the

point where we could no longer rely on that type of force to transport to the Middle East in the event that there was a necessity to do so. In his statement he alleges that he does not intend to make this a second-class power but by the various specifics of his proposal one can only come to the conclusion that we would be a second-class power. It is an isolationist document. It goes back to the days, even prior to World War II, when the country felt that we should stay away from entanglements abroad and it goes back to the time when this country would not be able to fulfill its mission of doing its very best to help other nations to help themselves and help keep the peace of the world. As a matter of fact, it is so isolationist that if it ever came to pass, I would suggest that we, instead of trying to maintain our commitments abroad in the Mid-East and other places, better withdraw in a hurry because we wouldn't be able to maintain our forces there. With that, I am ready for questions.

Question: Mr. Rhodes, why do you single out the Middle East and the Mediterranean?

Answer: I only did this because it was an example which came to mind. There are many other examples, of course - western Europe is one; the Far East is another. As a matter of fact, if you ever get down to six aircraft carriers, you might have problems even defending Hawaii. I didn't feel that I had the time to take every situation into account, but

I will be glad to answer any question on any specific situation which you care to offer. One thing that you probably should know that maybe you don't. I am not speaking from a complete lack of knowledge. I am a member of the Defense Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee of the House.

Question: Mr. Rhodes, could you be a bit more specific about who principally participated in the drafting of the Committee draft of the Platform Committee?

Answer: Yes, I will be very glad to. When I was first appointed to this position, of course, I conferred with Senator Allott and Governor Meskill and then I gathered some research assistants and we made an outline. The outline was expanded and when it got to the point where we thought it was a document which could be shared we called in the Republican members of the ranking Republicans of the various committees of the House and Senate to get their ideas. After this was done we sent the document to the White House to be staffed. It wasn't that we particularly wanted them to write any part of it - it was that we wanted them to check our pronouncements for accuracy and to, of course, make any suggestions they wanted to make. But, as was their right, and I wasn't unhappy that they did it, they added quite a bit. We got a document back that was 211 pages long, but obviously it was too long. So we, and I mean by that my research assistants and I, sat down and boiled it down to 95 pages. And I think the document is now 98 pages and holding, and I hope it holds.

Question: In this morning's paper, as I understand it, Representative Don Riegle of Michigan made charges that he has been shunted off to a Subcommittee while Administration spokesmen were allowed to appear before the Full Committee where I imagine they will receive greater media coverage. And I also understand that you termed the charges as juvenile. I wonder if you could explain the exchange between you and him a little bit greater. And also how you did choose who it was to appear before the Subcommittee and the Full Committee?

Answer: Well, first, there are thirteen members of the House and four Senators who are going to testify before Subcommittees, so Congressman Riegle is not the only one who is testifying before Subcommittees. Naturally, I would have liked to have every member of the House and Senate and every member of the Cabinet to testify before the Full Platform Committee. But the facts are that the reason for this exercise is to educate the members of the Platform Committee and not to give exposure to members of the House and Senate. So in order to do that the best way possible I tried to get as balanced of a program as I could. I felt certainly it was necessary to have both the liberal wing and the conservative wing and I am talking about the more extreme parts of that now of the party represented, and so to represent the Right Wing I chose Congressman Ashbrook of Ohio, not because

he has been a presidential candidate but because he is a very articulate, well known representative of the Right Wing of the Party. For the other side, I chose the liberal I have known the longest and the best and have the most respect for, incidentally; and that happens to be Senator Javits of New York - a real honest, good liberal, and this was done for the purpose of educating the Platform Committee as to various points of view and for no other reason at all. I think that Congressman Riegle and I are still friends. I am still his friend, and I hold nothing against him at all.

Question: I just wonder why it is we can't see this suggested document - this ninety-five page wonder.

Answer: Of course, the document, as far as I know, has never been seen by the press until it was released and I think that all of you here, being professionals, will understand why. If we were to release this document all it would be would be a suggested draft and it may or may not resemble the document which finally comes out. If it does resemble the document, then, of course, you will have already written the story piecemeal and the Platform will get nothing in the way of type of impact from the public which I think it deserves. If the final document does not resemble a draft, then the story will be not in what is in the final document but in the differences between that and the draft, and I think most of you on sober reflection will agree with me that this would not be any way to handle this situation. After all, what the

country is interested in, and I would imagine what all of us in this room are interested in, is the final product. What we do, what the document says, whether its' honest, whether it represents the opinion of the Party. Whether it sets forth a program for four years which is acceptable to the American people. And this is the way it will have to be. Now let me say before I leave that point, however, that I do intend to do something which I don't think has been done, at least since I have known anything about the Platform Committee. We are going to begin our deliberations on amending the draft on Thursday night and we will continue Friday. When the Preamble and the first section have been perfected, I intend to release them, so that you will get part of the Platform on Friday. I don't know what time, of course, but some day on Friday part of them will be released.

Question: What portion will that be?

Answer: It will be the Preamble and the portion on national defense and foreign policy; and, hopefully, we can divide the rest of the document into thirds and perhaps we can get another third out to you Saturday morning and then, hopefully, the final third on Saturday night or Sunday morning. This, of course, is all subject to the ability of the staff to do the final work which is necessary in editing and doing the preparation which goes into expurgating - not expurgating - but cleaning up the language of the amendments.

Question: John Gardner has written you a letter asking

for open mark-up sessions. Do you plan to keep them closed?

Answer: It would be my intent to keep them closed and not for any reason other than the ones I have just stated about the most efficient and I think the best way of releasing the Platform. We will have no secrets. If we take any votes - the roll call votes in the closed session - the votes will be announced as to number and so and so forth. It isn't a desire for secrecy - it is a desire for expedition. We are down here for only one week and we do have to get this job done in order to present the Platform properly before the Convention.

Thank you gentlemen, ladies.