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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND TOWN HALL MEETINGGymnasium Stage,
Pittston Area Senior High School

(3:34 P.M. EDT)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Bob Casey. When you have a man like Bob Casey with you you're way ahead of the game to start with. Right? (Cheer.) I'm also very glad to be in the district of Congressman Musto, who -- (cheer) -- I can see you know a lot about him already. Right? He's a man who gets things done and doesn't waste much time doing it. (Cheer.) I noticed as president that he was sworn in one day and the next day he announced a \$1.2 million grant from the Economic Development Administration. (Cheer. Applause.) That's the fastest work I've ever seen on Capitol Hill.

I just came from a series of Democratic rallies in Boston, Massachusetts with Senator Ted Kennedy. (Cheer. Applause.) And being in Boston at a political with Ted Kennedy is like being, as you know, in Veterans Stadium with Pete Rose. It's a nice arrangement to have. (Cheer.) When you're going into the home stretch of a major contest they're the kind of people that you want to have on your team.

I know a lot of you are thinking perhaps as much or more about baseball as you are about politics. This presidential campaign is kind of like the national pennant race. It's tight, it's going down to the wire, and if you support me the way you did the Phillies, we're going to pull this one out together and in this race you can be a player too, right, not just a spectator. (Cheer. Applause.)

Pete Rose and others are heroes in this state. I come from Georgia. If you ask almost anyone in Georgia who is the greatest football player who ever played in this country they would say Charlie Trippi. (Applause.) As a matter of fact, he played at the University of Georgia when I was in college. Unfortunately, I was at Georgia Tech. They wiped us out, with his help. And I remember that he went to World War II, interrupted his college education, came back later, continued his college career, went to the Sugar Bowl, helped win a victory, threw a 67-yard pass, which I think is still the Sugar Bowl record.

MORE

Q President Carter, I am very concerned about the present war between Iraq and Iran and how it affects our hostages. My question to you is when was the last time you have had positive confirmation that all of the hostages are still alive and well.

THE PRESIDENT: What is your name?

Q Joe Wallison.

THE PRESIDENT: Joe, for almost a year now, I don't believe an hour has gone by any day that I've spent, any hours that I was awake that I didn't think about or even say a prayer for those hostages. We have been through several phases of trying to get the hostages released, as you know, working directly with the Iranian officials, working through intermediaries from other countries, sending secret missions to Iran, meeting Iranian officials, either directly or through surrogates in other countries, working directly through the United Nations, making public statements, working with the Iranian officials -- the president and the Foreign Minister both of whom agreed to release the hostages back in May.

So far as we know now, the best intelligence information we have from various sources which I can't describe to you, the hostages are all alive and they're all safe. We have a way of communicating directly on occasions with three of the hostages who are being held in the Foreign Ministry or the Department of State building in Tehran. I don't believe that the Iran-Iraq war has put the hostages' lives in danger.

I have maintained since they were first taken two basic principles that are not incompatible one with another. First, to protect the integrity and the principles and the interests of my nation. And secondly, not to do anything as a president that would endanger the lives or the safety of the hostages or their chance to come back to freedom at the earliest possible moment.

We believe that there ought to be an end to the hostilities between Iran and Iraq and an immediate commitment of negotiations to settle the disputed boundaries between them. This reflects the long standing policy of our country that all territorial disputes should be settled peacefully and not by aggression. The United States remains committed to the proposition that the national security and integrity of Iran is in the interest of national stability.

We oppose any effort to dismember Iran, to cut away part of it and separate it from the rest of Iran. I hope and pray that now that Iran finally has elected officials -- it's got a president now, it's got a prime minister now, it's got a parliament elected called a Majlis, and it's got a speaker of that parliament elected --

since those officials are now in office, there may be a chance for us to make some progress -- I can't predict anything because they're so unpredictable -- toward having someone speak for the government of Iran and realize that they have been extremely ill-advised in keeping those hostages in their country. So we're doing everything we can to end the war. I don't think it's affecting the lives and safety of the hostages. We're making every effort to get those hostages home safe and I don't believe that we -- Well, I can say that all of the information that we have indicates that the hostages are indeed alive and safe. (Applause.)