

Transcript of President's First News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Topics

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's news conference yesterday in Washington, his first since becoming President, as recorded by The New York Times.

OPENING STATEMENT

How do you do. I have a brief opening statement here before I take your questions.

Yesterday, Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan sent to the Congress a request to raise the debt ceiling to \$80 billion. This represents a dramatic jump of \$50 billion over the previous debt ceiling.

The Administration took this action with great regret because it's clear that the massive deficits our Government runs is one of the root causes of our profound economic problems. And for too many years this process has come too easily for us.

We've lived beyond our means and then financed our extravagance on the backs of the American people. The last message I received from the campaign is that we must gain control of this inflationary monster.

Let me briefly review, for the American people, what we've already done:

Within months of taking the oath of office, I placed a freeze on the hiring of civilian employees in the Federal Government. Two days later I issued an order to cut down on Government travel, reduced the number of consultants to the Government, stopped the procurement of certain items, and acted on my authority to exercise restraints in their own offices.

Yesterday, I announced the elimination of remaining Federal controls on U.S. oil production and exports.

Today, I'm announcing two more actions to reduce the size of the Federal Government.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Policy Toward Iran

Q. Mr. President, will your policy toward Iran be one of reviving the reconciliation? And will the United States honor the recent commitments to Iran, especially since you approved most of them during the campaign?

A. Well, I'm not — certainly not — thinking of revenge. And I don't see whether reconciliation would be possible with the present Government or absence of a government in Iran. I think that the United States will honor its obligations. As a matter of fact, the most important of those were already put into effect by the preceding Administration in negotiating the release.

We are, however, studying, because there were four major agreements that were nine executive orders, and we are studying thoroughly what is a pretty complex matter, we've discussed, with regard to whether they are in keeping with international and national — our own national laws.

And so I won't be able to really answer your questions on specifics until we've completed that study.

Extent of Budget Cuts

Q. Mr. President, the Treasury Secretary said Monday that your budget cuts will be of a much higher magnitude than people might think you would be. You said they would be across-the-board. Now that you've had some time to study the budget, can you say where these — where the cuts will be made and what programs will feel the cuts the most?

A. They'll be made every place. What we meant by — maybe across-the-board was the wrong decision, although it describes it — what we meant was that no one is exempt from being looked at for areas in which we can make cuts in spending. And yes, they probably are going to be bigger than anyone has ever attempted; because this Administration did not come here to carry out Government as usual. And we hope we could go along the same way, and maybe do a little better.

We think the time has come where there has to be a change of direction of this country. And it's going to begin with reducing Government spending.

Retribution for Terrorists

Q. Mr. President, in your welcoming address to the freed Americans, you sounded a warning of swift and effective retribution for terrorists in such situations. What kind of action are you prepared to take to back up this hard rhetoric?

A. Well, that's a question that I don't think you — you can, or should, answer in — as to specifics. This is a big and a powerful nation. It has a great tradition — as to how to try and specify now just particularly what you should do, I think is one of the things that were wrong.

Strategic Arms Treaty

Q. Mr. President, you campaigned rather vociferously against the SALT II treaty, saying it was slanted slightly toward the Soviet Union, and yet I noticed your Secretary of State, Mr. Haig, now seems to suggest that for the time being at least the United States will abide by the limits of the SALT II treaty, and he hopes the Soviet Union will too. How long do you intend that the United States should abide by the terms of a SALT agreement which you consider inequitable? And what do you consider its greatest inequities to be?

A. Well, the SALT treaty first of all, I think permits a continued buildup on both sides of strategic nuclear weapons but for — the main thing authorizes an immediate increase in large numbers of Soviet warheads. There is no verification as to the number of warheads on the missiles and no method for us to do this.

I don't think that a treaty — SALT means strategic arms limitation — that actually permits a buildup on both sides of strategic nuclear weapons can properly be called that. And I have said that when we can — and I am willing

First, I'm taking major steps toward the elimination of the Council on Wage and Price Stability. This council has been a failure; it has been totally ineffective in controlling inflation and it's imposed unnecessary restrictions on labor and business. Therefore, I am now ending the wage and price program of the council. I am eliminating the staff that carries out its wage-fixing activities and I'm asking Congress to rescind its budget; saving the taxpayer some \$1.5 million a year.

My second decision today is a directive ordering key Federal agencies to freeze pending regulations for 90 days. This action gives my Administration time to start a new regulatory oversight process and also permits certain key executive orders to be rescinded from the previous Administration — the so-called midnight regulations — from taking effect without proper review and approval.

All of us should remember that the Federal Government is not some mysterious institution comprised of buildings, files and paper. The people are real, reduced the number of consultants to the Government, stopped the procurement of certain items, and acted on my authority to exercise restraints in their own offices.

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for our people to go into negotiations, or let me say discussions leading to negotiations, that we should start negotiating on the basis of trying to get an actual reduction in the numbers of nuclear weapons. That would then be real security.

And I happen to believe, also, that you can't sit down at a table and just negotiate. You have to take an account — in consideration at that table — all the other things that are going on. In other words, I believe in linkage.

Soviet Intentions

Q. Mr. President, what do you see as the long-range intentions of the Soviet Union? Do you think, for instance, the Khrushchev-Kennedy pact, that might lead to a continuation of the cold war? Or do you think that under certain circumstances détente is possible?

A. Well, so far détente has been a one-way street the Soviet Union has used to its own aims. I don't have to think of an answer as to what I think their intentions are: they have repeated over and over again that they intend to have a peaceful world. And I have always thought, more of a kind of gesture than it was — a something real.

Natural Gas Decontrol

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Iran-Soviet Stability

Q. Mr. President, Iran and the Soviet Union share a long border in a region vital to the future and stability of the world. Given the anti-U.S. sentiment there, how do you best think the United States can insure the stability of the region?

A. Of the — you said Iran, the border between Iran and the Soviet Union. Well, I think one of the first things that has to happen is — for stability has to be in Iran itself to establish a government that can speak as a sovereign.

And part of our problem in all these long 44 days has been the inability of the government to speak for the nation; to have a government. Now, I think that any country would want to have a government that would be able to speak for the nation; to have a government.

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Conservative Unhappiness

Q. Mr. President, a number of conservative leaders — among them some of your staunchest and most durable supporters, such as Senator Jesse Helms, are very concerned about some of your appointments. The basis of the concern is that many people who have been long Republicans and supporters of yours do not seem to be able to get jobs, like Bill Cleveland, who played a key role on your defense transition. But whereas most individuals who have not supported you throughout the years, or your philosophy, like Mr. Terro Bell, the Secretary of Education, who was for the establishment of the department which you said you wanted to abolish, and Mr. Frank Carlucci, destined to be Secretary of Defense, who was not a supporter of yours, that they have gotten jobs.

My question is: why are these individuals in your Administration, why is it, Mr. Van Clief, that you have a problem do you think this conservative dissatisfaction with your appointments is?

Atlanta Child Killings

Q. Mr. President, will you do to honor the request by Federal officials from Atlanta officials — for you and the Federal Government to intervene in the Atlanta case of 17 missing black children?

A. Just a few minutes before I came in here that message was handed to me — that the Atlanta Mayor wanted to talk. And I will get someone in contact with him immediately.

Now, you recognize, of course, that possibly civil rights would be the only basis upon which we could have any jurisdiction down on this — for F.B.I., for example, on any other thing, there has been no evidence that would state lines or anything. And yet we would be helpful because that is a most tragic case. And we will be meeting with it very shortly.

Corporate Deals in Iran

Q. Mr. President, what is your opinion of American companies that now want to resume business with Iran?

A. My opinion is that American companies that want to resume business with Iran? I hope they're going to do it by distance. We're going to go back to having just a different cast of characters with the same show going on.

I can understand that, particularly in the field of energy, that wanting to do that. But we are — we're urging that people think long and hard, before they travel to Iran, because we don't think they're safety can be guaranteed there.

U.S. Prisoners Abroad

Q. Mr. President, three Americans are still incarcerated in Vietnam. [Apparently the questioner meant Iran.] Can you tell us of the status of these cases and whether the Administration is doing anything to get them back?

A. I have told our people that these three are — they know about them, of course. But I've told them that yes, we continue. And we want to get them back.

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Q. Mr. President, some administrative officials have promised adherence to the civil rights laws which are on the books but there has been considerable affirmative action aspect of — that gives those laws to some people greater meaning, and I'm wondering, Mr. President, if there will be a retreat in the Federal Government on the Government's policy of affirmative action programs generally, and in Federal hiring of blacks and Hispanics, especially in large numbers.

A. No, there will be no retreat. This Administration is going to be dedicated to equality. And I'm sure the great progress in the civil rights field. I think there are some things, however, that have — that may not be as understood as they are. And I think even be distorted in the practice: such as some affirmative action programs becoming a registration at all.

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I think this opens the door for us to have a policy in the Mediterranean and bringing them back in — those countries that might have started in that direction — or keeping them in the Western world and free world. And we are looking forward to cooperation with Prime Minister Seaga.

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President Reagan calling for a question at his news conference yesterday

to be looked at further down — I've only been here nine days and most of those nine days have been spent in Cabinet meetings on the economy, getting ready to send our package up to the Hill. And so I just have to tell you that we will be dealing with that — meet with that, and make a decision on what to do with it down the road somewhat.

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A. Well, to answer the last part first: I just didn't feel that the advance registration, on all the evidence we could get, would materially speed up the process if an emergency required the draft. It did create a bureaucracy, and it was certainly, some unrest and dissatisfaction. And we were told that it would only be a matter of several days, if we had to call up in a draft, that we could do that several days earlier with the registration than we would be able to do if there was no registration at all.

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Latin America Policy

Q. Mr. President, when the Jamaican Prime Minister was here yesterday, Mr. Seaga, he suggested publicly that now would be a good time for you, as the new President, to have a foreign policy initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean. Do you intend to follow that suggestion? And, if so, how would your policies differ from those of former President Carter?

A. Well, I think we've seen a great reversion in the Caribbean situation and it came about through Prime Minister Seaga's election. It was the turnover — or turnaround — of a nation that had gone from being one of the poorest in the Caribbean to the Communist movement, kind of a — it was a protégé of Castro — and his election was great — greeted by me with great enthusiasm because I represented a people by their vote having experienced that kind of government turnaround in their direction.

I think this opens the door for us to have a policy in the Mediterranean and bringing them back in — those countries that might have started in that direction — or keeping them in the Western world and free world. And we are looking forward to cooperation with Prime Minister Seaga.

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