

Social Issues

Mr. Schneider. Mr. President, there are those who claim that a second Reagan administration would be a much more dogmatic, conservative administration, that you'd be pushing harder on your so-called social agenda—pushing for a constitutional ban on abortion, for a ban on school busing. Would that happen under a second Reagan administration?

The President. Well, I have been strongly in favor of a number of measures—the tuition tax credits, for one. And now we've made some progress in the last few days on prayer in schools. But I certainly wasn't seeking to impose prayers; I simply wanted to give them permission to pray if they wanted to, and it'd be up to them.

And, with regard to abortions, I feel that unless and until someone can establish that the unborn child is not a living human being, then that unborn child is protected by the constitutional protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And if you found a body and you didn't know whether it was dead or alive, you wouldn't bury it until you found out for sure that it was not living. And I feel the same way about the unborn child.

In fact, all of the medical evidence, so far, proves definitely that the unborn child is a living human being. And we have no right to take its life unless it would be taking that life in protection of the mother's life.

Mr. Schneider. Mr. President, thank you very much for letting the people of south Florida know how you feel. We appreciate it.

The President. Thank you.

Note: The interview began at 3 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. It was recorded for later broadcast.

The transcript of the interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 1.

Domestic and Foreign Issues

Interview With Forrest Sawyer of WAGA-TV in Atlanta, GA. July 27, 1984

1984 Presidential Campaign Debates

Mr. Sawyer. Mr. President this is Forrest Sawyer in Atlanta. It's a pleasure to talk with you.

The President. Forrest, hello.

Mr. Sawyer. Let's start with some good old-fashioned politics. Geraldine Ferraro has said that if this is a campaign without national debate, then it will dwindle to name-calling. Jimmy Carter has said he's convinced that you're going to try to avoid a debate. And you've said you're going to leave it up to your campaign manager. It's a critical issue. Why not decide yourself and declare whether or not you want to debate?

The President. I've said all the way, I support the idea of debate; debated in the last election and would do so in this next one. I did not accept that statement of Vice President Mondale that we should have a half a dozen or more debates. As a matter of fact, I think we could bore the pants off the viewers if we did something of that kind. But I believe that there is something that we can agree upon in the nature of debating, and I look forward to doing that.

Mr. Sawyer. How many would you like, sir?

The President. Frankly, I think two would be as many as the public should stand for. But, again, as I did say that I think that those who work on the planning of strategy and the schedules, and so forth, have to be considered in this, and I am looking forward to listening to their counsel and advice.

Mr. Sawyer. Would you like Vice President Bush to debate Ms. Ferraro?

The President. That is another issue that I think has to be decided involving them and involving strategy. Remember, the election really is between the two candidates for President. You can't get elected Vice President unless the head of the ticket wins.

Anne M. Burford

Mr. Sawyer. Sir, let's talk about the environment. Anne Burford left the Environmental Protection Agency under a cloud. You have reappointed her to an advisory committee on oceans and environment—on oceans and atmospheres, and that has upset environmental groups. Since she left the EPA in such a shambles, why reappoint her?

The President. Well, I don't think she did leave it in a shambles. And I just believe

that when someone has been the victim of an attempted lynching, then someone ought to come to the rescue.

Anne Burford was called up to appear before a House committee. And the House committee was demanding documents from her, and we ruled, with the advice of the Justice Department, that we were going to stand for executive privilege and not make them available, because those documents were part—well, they were investigatory reports. And if it developed that in the continuing investigation there was reason for legal action against other individuals, that could be compromised by opening up those records. So, she was simply carrying out our orders in refusing to make those records available and certainly didn't deserve the treatment that she received.

And I said from the very first that while they made it impossible for her to do anything but resign, that I was going to find a place for her, because I wanted her as a part of our administration.

Recreation Area in Georgia

Mr. Sawyer. Mr. President, an environmental issue of critical concern to Georgians: the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. Originally, 6,500 acres were intended to be purchased. Under your administration, that has been cut to something less than half, and whether more critical lands will be purchased is up in the air. Will you free more money for purchase?

The President. Well, my understanding is that in the review of that land and the study of that land, 3,600 acres has been approved for additional—addition to that park. At the same time, more land—I don't know whether it's limited to the 6,500 or the balance of it that you mentioned or whether it's even more—more land has been or is being studied, and we are talking about trying to get together with counties, local communities, and the State in efforts for a joint purchase of additional land. And I can't tell you what the situation is with regard to that right now, or what the balance is that's being considered.

Nicaragua

Mr. Sawyer. Mr. President, Nicaragua. You are giving money for what some people call a not-so-secret war there. You are supporting anti-Sandinista guerrillas, whose open aim is to overthrow the government. Yet your administration has been saying you don't support the overthrow. How do you square those two?

The President. No, actually, what those people are, those so-called guerrillas, or *contras*, as they're called in Nicaragua, are actually—and for the most part, people who were participants in the original revolution and then had that revolution stolen from them by the Communist Sandinistas. And some of them were ousted from the country, some of them were jailed; they were denied any part in the government.

What we're trying to support down there is the honest desire of the people of Nicaragua to have the revolution that was promised them. The Sandinistas and the others had promised the Organization of American States that the revolution's goals were freedom of the press, freedom to have labor unions, human rights, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of religion—all the things that we believe are democratic.

Once in, the Sandinistas ousted the others and have a totalitarian, Marxist-Leninist—a Communist government, totalitarian and with a denial of the rights of the citizens, and the people down there are being oppressed by that government. And we believe that we have an obligation to support the legitimate demands of the Nicaraguan people.

Mr. Sawyer. Mr. President, from Atlanta, thank you for the conversation.

The President. Thank you.

Note: The interview began at 3:06 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. It was recorded for later broadcast.

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