

Office of Governor Dan Evans
September 9, 1974 9:30 a.m.
Olympia, Washington


MAIN TOPIC
Amnesty for President Nixon

TRANSCRIPTION OF NEWS CONFERENCE

Those newsmen covering the news conference were: Gordon Schultz and Bob McDaniel, UPI; John White and Dave Ammons, AP; Robert Cummings, The Tacoma News Tribune; Fred Olson, The Daily Olympian; Lyle Burt, The Seattle Times; Joel Kamisher, KOIN Radio.

AMNESTY FOR PRESIDENT NIXON

Governor Evans - The announcement of the President came, of course, as a great surprise and perhaps even a shock to most Americans. I would view this as one of those close calls that the President or anyone in high political office is called on to make from time to time. I am sure that it was not an easy choice for the President. If it had been an easy choice, it would have been done long ago. However, I think on balance it was the right choice. There is little question that we are facing some difficult times economically. I applaud the President for his determination to personally take part in the forthcoming Conference on Inflation. I applaud his determination to get the nation's attention on the major issues which face it. And I think in this case that the pardon of the former President will aid us in that process. By putting at least his potential trial out of the way it affords having that as a major national event for at least the forthcoming year. As I say, it wasn't an easy choice. I am sure the President didn't find it an easy choice. It is quite obvious that it will be received as a split decision by the American people but I am confident in the long run it will turn out to have been the right decision.

Schultz - Do you think that the President's decision sets a double standard in light of the fact that other Watergate defendants are under indictment and prosecuted, for example, John Ehrlichman, who has been found guilty. Hasn't he suffered enough as well? Shouldn't he get a pardon? What about the double standard here? Do you see one?

Governor Evans - Well, perhaps there is. Although I really think that what we are talking about in this case is a pardon to accomplish an important purpose which cannot be accomplished with a pardon or with the postponement or forgetting of the trials of any of those others who were involved in the Watergate system. Of course, the very important purpose is to attempt to get the nation's attention on what appears to be the major issues of the day.

Ammons - Are you saying that if our nation did not face such pressing problems, say in another day, another hour, that perhaps the decision would have been different?

Governor Evans - I think it might have been. Of course, I don't know insofar as what President Ford's thinking was or whether it would have changed his mind in a different circumstance. I think, I think it might have for instance, if it had been my decision. I think it might have made a difference as to the timing or the circumstances of the country at that given point in time. As I say, I am sure it was a close call or close decision. And so different circumstances might have tipped it just enough to make the decision go the other way.

Kamisher - Do you think this will leave any unanswered questions as you had said earlier when you opposed his resignation?

Governor Evans - I doubt it. I think there is little question that the President is still going to be required to respond to subpoenas, required to testify at trials. In fact there is one interesting turn in this whole thing insofar as he has now been pardoned or is exempt from prosecution for that period of time that is now under consideration, I would presume that he cannot claim the fifth amendment in terms of potential self-incrimination and it might very well be that more of the story of the true and full story of Watergate will come out than could have been the case otherwise.

White - Well if you were a juror, would you in good conscious vote for conviction of Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Haldeman knowing that the man at the top doesn't have to answer to this now?

Governor Evans - I think any juror has to do what he is called upon to do. And a juror's responsibility is to listen to evidence presented at a case and make a determination of guilt

or innocence based on that evidence. And a juror is not asked to make those decisions and to relate to other cases. When it comes time assuming that the jury were to find some of these other defendant guilty, then, of course, in the sentencing of someone a judge might very well take into account other circumstances, mitigating circumstances, but that's, I don't believe that's the responsibility of a juror to do so.

Kamisher - President Nixon's statement that he issued from the White House, some people said that it didn't admit guilt, it didn't show enough remorse?

Governor Evans - I don't think the question of how much remorse is shown or whether someone is satisfied with the way the words have been put together by the former President to respond are really the key here. I think the key is the action that has been taken and the reason, at least, I believe the action was taken which I have tried to express, the fact that it was a close call and the fact that I think that it probably on balance was the right decision.

Schultz - Would the President be justified in granting unconditional pardon to those who fled to Canada to avoid service in Vietnam?

Governor Evans - Well I think he has taken the right step now and that is to examine each of those on a case-by-case basis. When you are talking about a blanket amnesty for all who fled, that would be pretty difficult to do simply because the circumstances were so different in individual cases. But certainly the President has taken a major first step and I do emphasize the idea of first step because I think there will be others to examine these concerns, do it on a case-by-case basis and I rather imagine that a pretty fair share of those examined will be received back.

Ammons - Are you satisfied that there was no deal between Ford and Nixon to arrive at this decision?

Governor Evans - I am sure of it. I have not heard that the question has been asked of the President. It may or not ever be asked of him. I don't know. It depends on the members of the press at future press conferences. But I would be absolutely astounded if there were any kind of such deal at all.

Schultz - Governor, the reaction to the President's decision has generally followed partisan lines. Would your response be the same if it were a Democratic president pardoning another former Democratic president?

Governor Evans - Well I suppose it would be easy to say yes, of course, it would be the same. Obviously, that circumstance has never been a real circumstance at least up to this time so it is difficult to say. I would hope it would be the same and I believe it would be the same. I simply think under the circumstances the concern is not so much for the man as it is for the country itself and the problems that we are in, the situation we are now in. And it's essentially the same kind of thing that existed when I gave the speech for amnesty some months ago. The concern then was not so much for the man or what happened to the man as it was for the country itself. And some have said that, well it's not an even standard of justice. Of course, anytime you give a pardon it is an individual act. I have given a handfull - three or four pardons - during the nine and a half years I have been Governor. But they have been pardons to individuals and it doesn't immediately then bring into focus equal pardons for a whole host of people who might be in for the same general category or guilty of the same kinds of crime. I think any kind of a pardon is very much an individual proposition and it cannot be related to either other crimes or other people.

Schultz - Governor, do you view the President's decision as having any political repercussions on the congressional elections coming up? Will it hurt Republicans?

September 9, 1974
Olympia, Washington

- 3 -

Governor Evans - I doubt that it will have very much implication on congressional races at all. The action taken was the action of a President. It was taken with, I am confident, with the view in mind that the nation's needs are now elsewhere and I believe this will help allow us to focus on the questions of inflation and the problems of the economy which ought to be the major issues for this fall's election campaign. They ought to be debated. I think the combination of this action along with the Conference on Inflation headed by the President will bring those issues into focus and that we will properly have the debate and the decision in the elections this fall made on those kinds of issues.

Schultz - Governor, the President's decision was made yesterday morning. Can you tell us why it has taken you so long to come up with a response?

Governor Evans - Well, I was out of the office or out of town yesterday. And I just felt that there has got to be one day every few weeks when you can get away with your family and that's where I was.

Thank you, Governor.

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(Typist KP)

