

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

The President's News Conference

given on May 1, 1952

THE PRESIDENT. Please be seated.

[1.] I want to open this conference up by telling you that I don't intend to answer any questions on the steel controversy, so you won't get a book full of no comments. Now you can ask me about anything else you want.

[2.] Q. Mr. President, there are rumors that Ambassador O'Dwyer ¹ of Mexico has submitted his resignation to you. Is
5 that true ?

THE PRESIDENT. No.

¹ William O'Dwyer, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico.

Q. Not true?

THE PRESIDENT. Not true.

10 [3.] Q. Mr. President, Senator Brier McMahon has announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination. Would you talk about his qualifications?

THE PRESIDENT. I think very highly of Brier McMahon. I think he is qualified for the job. Looks like we are going to get some good candidates in the field. Brier McMahon is all right.

Q. Mr. President, I think most of us have been convinced by what you said about your own candidacy, but I want to
15 ask one clarifying question. If the event should arise that you would be actually nominated by the convention in July, would you serve--would you run?

THE PRESIDENT. I would say no. I made that very plain in the statement that I made.

Q. Mr. President, you said you would not run if nominated ?

THE PRESIDENT. No. I would not run.

20 Q. Mr. President, do you think the situation might arise when Governor Stevenson of Illinois might accept a draft to nomination ?

THE PRESIDENT. Well now, that is a question for him to settle. He is another good man. He would make a good President.

[4.] Q. Mr. President, have you any comment to make on the visit here of President Somoza of Nicaragua, ² who is
25 coming in tonight?

THE PRESIDENT. He is coming, I think, to the White House for luncheon tomorrow, isn't that correct? I believe it is tomorrow?

² President Anastasio Somoza.

Joseph Short (Secretary to the President): That is correct.

30 Q. Who was that, Mr. President--I'm sorry?

THE PRESIDENT. The President of Nicaragua, Mr. Somoza. His daughter, who is the wife of the Nicaraguan Ambassador ³ here, is a schoolmate of Margaret.

³ Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States.

[5.] Q. Mr. President, I wonder if this would come under your ban? Mr. Wilson ⁴ said that you had bypassed him--I

35 think he said "nine ways from Sunday" in the steel situation ?

THE PRESIDENT. I haven't read Mr. Wilson's comments, and I have no comment to make.

4 Charles E. Wilson, who resigned as Director of Defense Mobilization as a result of differences with the President on the steel wage-price policy. See also Item 70.

Q. On that point, are you waiting for the steel thing to be settled down before you appoint a successor? Is that what the
40 delay is?

THE PRESIDENT. Not necessarily.

Q. I see.

THE PRESIDENT. No, that isn't necessarily it. It would be better, I think, to wait until we get these big controversies settled before a successor is appointed.

45 [6.] Q. Mr. President, this country has been getting a lot of protests lately, from Canada and Britain and Belgium, about increasing tariff protectionism as evidenced by Tariff Commission action on--applications for higher rates. And I believe Secretary Acheson said something about that the other day ?

THE PRESIDENT. I think he answered the question amply yesterday in his press conference. 5

5 The statement of Secretary of State Dean Acheson at his press conference on April 30 on the protests by the United
50 Kingdom against increased use by the United States of trade agreement escape clauses is Published in the Department of State Bulletin (vol. 26, p. 737).

Q. Are you disturbed about that trend?

THE PRESIDENT. No, I am not. I don't think there's any such a trend.

[7.] Q. Mr. President, there are a lot of conflicting reports about what you might do when you get a tidelands bill
55 before you. Could you explain whether you will or will not veto that legislation ?

THE PRESIDENT. When the bill comes to me for action, then I will tell you exactly what I will do. 6 I can't make any advance promises on what I might do.

6 For the President's statement upon vetoing the bill concerning title to offshore lands, see Item 146.

Q. Mr. President, Mr. Smoot 6a quoted you after a recent meeting and it was later repudiated. Would you comment on
60 that?

THE PRESIDENT. No, I will not.

6a G. A. Smoot, a former postmaster at Salt Lake City, Utah.

[8.] Q. Mr. President, this may be a steel question you may not want to answer--

THE PRESIDENT, All right.

65 Q--that I would like to ask you. Senator Humphrey said the other day that you would accept the decision of the Supreme Court in the steel seizure. 7

THE PRESIDENT. Of course I would. Of course I would.

7 On June 2 the Supreme Court ruled the seizure of the steel plants unconstitutional.

Q. Well, then, as far as you are concerned, the system of checks and balances goes on unimpeded?

70 THE PRESIDENT. Why certainly. Unimpeded. I have no ambition to be a dictator. All I have been trying to do is keep the country running.

[9.] Q. Mr. President, there are also reports that you are prepared to seize the oil industry because of the pending strike? [Laughter]

THE PRESIDENT. It has not been put up to me. I am hoping they will settle it. They are very close to settlement.

75 [10.] Q. Mr. President, along the steel sidelight lines, Representative Kilburn of New York said yesterday at a House Banking and Currency hearing that it was his opinion that if the Defense Production Act were not amended in the labor section so as to prevent a recurrence of the present controversy-that the House would not extend the Defense Production Act. Have you any comment on that?

THE PRESIDENT. No comment.

80 Q. Mr. President, there have been reports that you might make a radio address, or send another message to Congress on the steel situation. Anything in that?

THE PRESIDENT. I am not ready to make the announcement on that at this time. I am going to do everything I possibly can to get the matter straightened out, of course. What I want to do is to produce steel. We need steel. Steel is what I have been trying to get all the time. Nothing else.

85 [11.] Q. Sir, just to complete the record, you have stated that if you were nominated you would not run. Referring to the general named Sherman, I believe.

THE PRESIDENT. Yes?

Q. Would you serve if elected? [Laughter]

THE PRESIDENT. If I refuse the nomination, I couldn't be elected. [Laughter]

90 Q. Mr. President, we couldn't hear your reply over here, sir.

Q. Couldn't hear you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT. Well, he was quoting General Sherman. He wanted to know if I would go on and finish the sentence as Sherman did--if elected he wouldn't serve. I said if I do not accept the nomination I can't be elected. And that ends that.

95 [12.] Q. Mr. President, does this interfere with your statement at the outset that you didn't want to answer questions about steel ? Is it possible for you to answer this question ? How long could we go in this present situation, that is, with the plants shut down? Is it possible to answer that question?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I can't answer that without going into the whole thing in detail, and I don't want to do that while this matter is pending. I am going to take every action possible to get steel.

100 Q. Mr. President, including an injunction?

THE PRESIDENT. I am going to take every action possible to get steel.

[13.] Q. Mr. President, you just mentioned that you had no ambition to be a dictator. Do you believe, however, that emergency seizure powers could ever be used by a future President along such lines?

THE PRESIDENT. Well now, we can't answer that question until we have the final decision. It may require
105 legislation. We'll see.

Q. Mr. President, there is some legislation specifically covering the seizure of steel plants, isn't there, in the Selective Service Act?

THE PRESIDENT. I don't know. I can't answer that question.

[14.] Mr. President, there have been reports that a couple of Senators, anyway, have been sitting on postmaster
110 nominations pending congressional action on the reorganization plan which you sent to the Hill. 8 Do you approve of such action?

THE PRESIDENT. I don't know anything about it. I sent a reorganization plan down hoping that it would be accepted, and I think that will answer your question; but I don't know anything about action by individual Senators.

8 See Item 85.

115 [15.] Q. Mr. President, have you any report from Ambassador Briggs on visit with Mr. Oatis? 9

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. His message ported to me by the Secretary of State this morning. He said he found Mr. Oatis in good health, that he had had a recent haircut and had had some dental work done, that he had not been hungry, that he had gotten to the point now where he could sleep. We are doing everything we can to get him out, and we are going to continue just that.

120 9 Ellis O. Briggs, U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, had been allowed to visit William N. Oatis, an American newspaperman imprisoned in Prague on a charge of espionage. See also Item 49 [12].

[16.] Q. Mr. President, I will make one more try.

THE PRESIDENT. Go ahead, Pete. 10

10 Raymond P. Brandt of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

125 Q. Secretary Sawyer said that the steelworkers were not striking against the Government. Whom are they striking against?

Mr. Short [to the President]: Secretary Sawyer did not say that.

THE PRESIDENT. Wait a minute.

Q. He said, "The union certainly did not strike against the Government."

130 Q. Whom did they strike against?

THE PRESIDENT. I will let you answer the question, Pete.

Q. I don't know. That is what I am trying to clarify.

THE PRESIDENT. I can't answer the question-at the present time. I will tell you about it later.

135 Q. Mr. President, that question having been raised, the next question is, do you think the strike was justified at the time it was called ?

THE PRESIDENT. I have no comment.

[17.] Q. Mr. President, someone brought up the Selective Service Act as giving you authority to take over steel plants, and then you said you didn't know. Subdivision H, after referring to the fact that you can order it if you feel it necessary to the defense program, says, "If any such producer of steel, or responsible head or heads thereof, refuses to
140 comply with such requirement, the President through the Secretary of Defense is authorized to take immediate possession of the plant or plants of such producer or producers, and through the appropriate branch, bureau, or department of the Armed forces, to insure compliance with such requirements." Would you say that is legislative authority ?

THE PRESIDENT. We haven't gotten to that point as yet.

145 [18.] Q. Mr. President, can you comment on the May Day rioting in Tokyo, in which American property was damaged and American personnel were injured?

THE PRESIDENT. I have had no official communication on the subject, so I can't comment on it.

[19.] Q. Mr. President, could you say whether or not the solution of this steel crisis might follow the pattern of 1946?

150 THE PRESIDENT. I can't. I can't answer your questions on steel, and you can dodge around all you want to, now, you're just wasting time. I will talk to you about anything else.

[20.] Q. Mr. President, you have had some kind words to say about a couple of Democratic potentials. Have you ever noticed whether the--one of the Republican-leading Republican contenders for the Presidency was a sick man? Eisenhower 11 --there have been some stories that he is an ailing man.

THE PRESIDENT. Oh no, he's not anything of the kind. He's in perfect health. He's as fine a man as ever walked. I have told you that time and again. He's just beginning to find out what happens to a candidate. [Laughter] That's mild to what he will have to face a little later on.

11 General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower.

[21.] Q. Mr. President, Senator Williams made charges the other day regarding loans to the Democratic National Committee--Democratic committee in New York that had been charged off as tax losses. Senator George has introduced a bill to ban such loans. Do you think that's good.--

THE PRESIDENT. I don't know anything about it at all.

Reporter: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT. All right.

(2142 words)

Quelle: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14101&st=&st1=>

Aufgaben

1. At the beginning of the Press Conference, President Truman states that he will not talk about one subject. What is that subject? Why won't he discuss this topic?
2. 1952 is a presidential election year. What does President Truman say about running for a second term?
3. President Truman is questioned by a reporter as to how he would respond to a decision of the Supreme Court concerning the steel crisis. What is his response? Background: In 1952 steel workers threatened to strike and shut down production of steel across the country. The United States was at war in Korea and steel was needed to keep the troops supplied. In April 1952 President Truman signed an Executive Order authorizing Commerce Secretary, Charles Sawyer, to seize the steel companies to keep production going. His authority to issue such an order was being challenged in court by the owners of the steel mills.
4. What is Truman's standard response when a reporter asks him about the steel crisis?
5. What was President Truman's reply when he was asked about the condition of Associated Press reporter William Oatis? Background: William N. Oatis was the bureau chief in Prague, Czechoslovakia for the AP. He was arrested in April by Czech authorities. The charge against Oatis was espionage. He was sentenced to prison for ten years but he was released after 28 months. Oatis is called the "first American martyr to press freedom behind the Iron Curtain." The Czech government cleared his name of all charges in 1959.
6. What information did you gain from the audio or the printed text of the Press Conference that you would not have gained from a secondary source?
7. What were two themes or messages of the News Conference?
8. What did you learn about what was happening in society from the News Conference?
9. How would you describe President Truman's relationship with the press? Cite an example to support your answer.
10. What questions would you ask President Truman if you were a reporter in 1952?
11. What questions would you ask the current president if you had the opportunity to question him at a press conference today?