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Question Regarding the Oil Industry,
Increasing Imports, National Security

Question:

Mr. President, the oil and gas industry is in a shambles; production has fallen almost 10% since last year, employment fell 40% in the last few years, and imports have risen by almost 37% in 1987 over 1986. Your Secretary of the Interior says there will be gas lines and shortages in the next few years. This week the Secretary of Energy gave you a report which forecasts increasing oil imports from the Middle East to the same levels as occurred at the time of the two previous oil shocks in 1973 and 1979. What, Mr. President, do you plan to do to protect U.S. against such problems?

Answer:

My Administration's policy of primarily relying on markets has been very effective in assuring ample supplies of energy at reasonable prices. Although imports are indeed rising let's remember that the price of gasoline is .87 per gallon today and it was over a dollar a gallon in January 1981 when we came into office. A significant part of that price reduction is due to the fact that we have taken the government out of setting prices and allocations for petroleum products. We want to do the same with natural gas price controls. This would help the oil and gas industry which has indeed had difficulties during the past few years. Our continued filling of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, now over 500 million barrels compared to about 100 million barrels when we came into office, will provide us substantial protection in the event of a disruption. A number of other oil importing nations have also stockpiled oil providing further protection. As long as there are no new government price and allocation regulations there will not be gas lines in the future.

Background:

The Energy Security Study of the Department of Energy provides forecasts of possible oil import and oil price levels and lists possible policy options for consideration by the Government. Recommendations for changes in policy are not made in the Study. The White House position on the Study is that we are reviewing it and will await any recommendations that the Secretary of Energy desires to make.

March 17, 1987

Question:

Do you agree with the findings of the DOE Energy Security Study and do you plan to adopt any of the options in the report?

Answer:

About six months ago, I requested Secretary Herrington to complete the study because of concerns being raised about increased petroleum imports. I received the report several days ago and have not had time to review its contents nor has the Cabinet. Over the coming weeks we will complete the review and will take into account any recommendations by the Secretary of Energy.

Background:

The Energy Security Study of the Department of Energy provides forecasts of possible oil import and oil price levels and lists possible policy options for consideration by the Government. Recommendations for changes in the policy are not made in the Study.

March 17, 1987

Question Regarding Acid Rain and Related
Commitment to P.M. Mulrooney

Question:

Mr. President, last year you committed to Prime Minister Mulrooney to support the recommendations of the Lewis-Davis report regarding acid rain yet your 1988 budget in no way provides funding consistent with that report's recommendations for a five billion dollar industry-government control technology demonstration program to reduce emissions of acid rain precursors. Are you going to live up to your commitment?

Evidence is increasingly growing about damage occurring to lakes and forests due to acid rain both in the Rocky Mountain West and in the East and Southeast. When are you going to protect our environment by seeking reductions in the emissions of acid rain precursors like sulphur oxides and nitrogen oxides emitted from power plants and cars.

Answer:

I made a commitment to Prime Minister Mulrooney to support the recommendations of the report by Drew Lewis and William Davis, our special envoys, regarding a technology demonstration program and I will live up to that commitment. I will be discussing that report and our commitment with Prime Minister Mulrooney when I see him in April.

We have also continued spending large amounts of money (about \$85 million per year) on scientific aspects of the acid rain situation, its causes, effects, and implications. As I have said many times before, until many of the basic scientific puzzles surrounding this issue can be solved, we do not believe it is justified to impose an additional multibillion dollar per year control program on U.S. power plants.

Enormous reductions in emissions have already occurred in this country as a result of current environmental laws. Sulphur emissions have decreased by 43% since 1970 even though the use of coal has increased dramatically. We have decreased emissions more than any other country in the world.

March 17, 1987

Question Regarding the "Ozone Hole" over the Antarctic

Question:

Mr. President, scientists have observed a dramatic reduction in the amount of ozone over the South Pole and believe this reduction is due to the use of chlorofluorocarbons. i.e., refrigerants and spray propellants. They believe that hundreds of thousands of people will die in the U.S. alone from skin cancer over the next several decades due to this man caused reduction in the ozone layer throughout the world. Congress and many countries are seeking to lower the emissions of these materials. What do you plan to do to prevent this terrible outcome.

Answer:

The U.S. Government has been in the forefront of efforts throughout the world to protect the "ozone layer". We have already prohibited the use of chlorofluorocarbons in many non-essential uses, such as in "spray cans". We are also leading the scientific research to better understand the potential problem and its solution.

However, this is a global problem that requires a global effort to solve. In international negotiations we are pushing other countries to accept a freeze on emissions at current levels as a start. We have also been pushing for a global agreement to reduce further emissions by up to 95% if the scientific research indicates that those reductions are needed.

March 17, 1987