



Department of Justice

PS
668
.1116

PRESS CONFERENCE

ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN N. MITCHELL

RENO, NEVADA

October 7, 1970

Mr. Mitchell: Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a pleasure to be in Reno. I have no opening statement to make so if you have any questions, I'll try to answer them.

Reporter: President Nixon is going to talk to the American people tonight, apparently about Viet Nam. What he is going to say has been the most closely guarded secret in Washington, one of the most closely guarded secrets in the recent past. What is it in his talk that makes him keep it under wraps? Is there any particular thing that is different or something like that?

Mr. Mitchell: No, there is nothing different in this particular talk by the President than those in the past. When you say it's a closely guarded secret, I think the President should be allowed to speak for himself and present the matters to the American public and not have news leaks all over the place that sometimes come out in the wrong vein. The public gets the wrong impression before the words are said by the Chief Executive. I believe that the presentation he will make tonight

to the American public is comparable to some of those he has presented in the past, and, of course, it will have impact all over the world, particularly on Southeast Asia.

Reporter: Has there been any indication as to what reaction there is among members of the Administration as to what he will propose?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, the President will say tonight that he has consulted with Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Ambassadors in Southeast Asia I know are interested in it, and they're in full accord with his presentation.

Reporter: Mr. Attorney General, is this part of an extensive...I just want to find out if this is part of a considerable political swing or whether or what else politically, except Reno, are you going...

Mr. Mitchell: I don't do anything except try to represent the people of this country and to get the right members in the Senate and House of Representatives so we can get some of our legislative programs through.

Reporter: What else are you doing then?

Mr. Mitchell: Tomorrow I am meeting with some U. S. Attorneys from California in San Francisco on some of the problems we have in cases involving the draft, narcotics and some of the civil rights cases that have been in the press in California in recent days.

Hopefully, I will be able to speak for George Murphy when I'm out there because we certainly need him back in the Senate, as distinguished from another individual who is seeking that office, whose voting record is worse than anybody's in the House, except Adam Clayton Powell.

Reporter: I think that was his attendance record, wasn't it, that they were referring to in that instance?

Mr. Mitchell: His voting record.

Reporter: Mr. Attorney General, I noticed recently, in fact there were a few releases on my desk tonight, saying that the Justice Department is trying to get together with the kids on the campuses of 51 colleges which were sent letters offering to have your people go on the campus. The campus here has become somewhat of a campaign issue with Mr. Raggio. I was wondering what you had in mind as far as bringing your people on the campuses.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, during our term in office, we've met with many student groups, both undergraduate and law school, and with college professors and administrators. We have found through our dialogue that they have practically no understanding of what the Justice Department does, what it stands for. They confuse it with law enforcement agencies in states and at local levels. They have really no understanding of what our programs are. We thought it might be an appropriate thing to do if we could send our top people out of the Justice Department to the campuses for two purposes, to

explain what the Justice Department does and what it stands for and, secondly, to open up the dialogue, a discussion, debate, however you want to phrase it, with these students on the campus, so that we'll have a better understanding of what they know or don't know or what they feel or don't feel, and we will be able to get our position across. We've picked out some 50 odd campuses that we think are representative. We have not forced ourselves upon them. We have communicated with the college administration and told them whatever forum they had that was viable in this area, that we would be pleased to go there and undertake this dialogue.

Reporter: Would you have accepted an invitation from the University of Nevada? I understand there is a group up there that would have liked to have you up there while you were here, but...

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I did not hear that, and, if so, we might have been able to reorient my schedule. I am not sure whether the University of Nevada is on our list or not, but if the University is desirous of having somebody from the Justice Department, and I'm talking about the top level people, I'm sure we'd be glad to accommodate them.

Reporter: How will the Scranton report, in your opinion, effect your efforts this fall to get out and reach people on the campus, as to what its conclusions were?

Mr. Mitchell: I don't think it will have any effect upon it, whatsoever.

Reporter: The other day you spoke of wiretapping's increased use and you said one main reason was to combat crime in gambling. Could you tell us to what extent wiretapping is used in Nevada and what results it brings, say in the last year or so.

Mr. Mitchell: Wiretapping has not been used in Nevada at all because of some circumstances that exist out here, going back and arising out of some circumstances that developed a considerable number of years ago, before we ever got into office. Hopefully, that circumstance will be worked out so that an appropriate case, unrelated to gambling which is legal out here, but dealing with organized crime, will permit us to use it.

Reporter: You say you haven't used wiretapping, in the last year or since you took office, in all of Nevada?

Mr. Mitchell: That's right.

Reporter: You don't feel the need of it?

Mr. Mitchell: No. As I say, there are certain circumstances arising out here that developed out of past performances, before we came into office, which did not make it feasible for us to use it.

Reporter: What were they?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, that's a long story. You ask one of the old reporters and they'll tell you.

Reporter: How would you assess the effort by the Administration, I guess with your tour and with the Vice President's tour, to gain control in the Senate or to get more seats in the Senate? How would you assess that effort so far?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, if I may be so bold as to correct you, it is to get control of the Senate. I don't know anything about politics, but from what people tell me, there is a distinct possibility that the Republicans can capture control of the Senate. We think it is most important that the Republican Party do that, so that the President can have some support in the Senate. If you would like a few examples, I will point out that the President sent a message to the Congress on January 31, 1969, for a court reorganization and crime bill in the District of Columbia and it wasn't passed until July of 1970. We sent up a drug bill--most important legislation--in July of 1969, it is still languishing in the Congress. We sent up an organized crime bill in April, 1969, and it is still languishing in Congress. We sent up legislation on pornography back in the Spring of 1969. That has not been passed and doesn't look like it will be passed, and I can go on down the list. A lot of this, as you gentlemen know, relates to committees and their functions in Congress. Some of the committees, particularly in the House, have just bottled up these bills and we've been unable

to get them out, even to get them to a vote. This is why, if this Administration is going to carry out its programs, it's going to have to have support from Congress.

Reporter: How would you assess the effort of getting that support so far, as far as the campaigns are coming?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, as I say, I don't know anything about politics. I left that on the doorstep when I went in the Justice Department. Yet, I read in the papers that the Administration has a good opportunity of capturing the Senate. It has been traditional in off-year elections to lose seats in the House of Representatives, but I'm sure there is a strong feeling in Washington, at least among our party, that they are going to pick up seats in the House, rather than lose them this year. We need them.

Reporter: You said that you were going from here to California. What other states do you plan to visit in this political contest between now and November?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I'm going directly back to Washington, and as far as I know, I don't have any scheduled. I wouldn't be surprised that I might be shanghaied in the meantime, between now and November 3, but at the moment I have no plans.

Reporter: Can you tell us what the results have been of the strike force set up in L. A. to deal with organized crime in the three states, Nevada ...

Mr. Mitchell: Well, as you know, it is a recent organization.

Reporter: About a year old?

Mr. Mitchell: No, it is not a year old. I beg your pardon. It is much newer than that. As you know, we do not go against individual crime in a strike force operation. We go against organized crime syndicates. It takes weeks and months of investigations and my reading of the strike force out here is one of great progress. I'm sure, as in other cases around the country, and other areas around the country, that it will be quite productive.

Reporter: A lot of people today are expecting to see your wife accompany you. Why was she unable to come?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, there is a lot of speculation about that. Some people thought she had to stay back and help the President write his speech. (Laughter) I can flatly deny that. She may have telephoned him a few times. (Laughter) Actually, she and our daughter caught the flu overnight and she has been bedridden last night and today.

Reporter: Does she enjoy traveling with you on occasions like this?

Mr. Mitchell: I hope so, I'm her husband. (Laughter)

Reporter: I mean because of the schedule in the activity?

Mr. Mitchell: Well, as far as I can say about my wife, if I can put it as succinctly as it can be, she loves to go places and say things. (Laughter)

Reporter: Is this your first time to Reno, Sir?

Mr. Mitchell: Oh, no. I've been to Reno lots of times, and Las Vegas, too. I think this city is great. I've done a lot of legal work out here in the State of Nevada and various places.

Reporter: Are you a gambler?

Mr. Mitchell: Am I a gambler? Honey, I'm such a poor gambler that the only time I was ever at a roulette table, I bet on both the black and the red. (Laughter)