

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

APPEARING AT NBC STUDIOS WITH

PANELISTS TOM BROKAW, ROBERT

ABERNATHY, AND PETER BURNS

- - -

Burbank, California

September 10, 1968

WARD & PAUL

OFFICIAL REPORTERS

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Tuesday, September 10, 1968
10:40 a.m.

MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, in your lifetime do you remember a time when this country was ever more divided than it is right now?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I suppose during the depression days there was much more violence than there is right now. Some of us may have forgotten it but there was a great distrust of the whole system during those days. I can remember my days on the campus of the University of Minnesota when we had more odd group centers than they have now. There were the young facist clubs, young communist clubs and there were Jacobins and in my part of the country the farmer-laborites and the Democrats. The Democrats always split up into about three or four groups and then there were others that were just protesting in general against ROTC, and you name it. I think we were divided.

I think there is a different kind of division now about, some of it based not only on bitterness about the war. There is a racial strife in the country which is unhealthy.

MR. ABERNATHY: If you are elected President, what could you do that President Johnson has not done and he is devoted to this ideal of national unities. What could you do that he has not done or Mr. Nixon could not do to reunify it?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, a new person as President comes in with some good will by the electorate, fortunately, in the United States. The American people believe in giving every man his chance. And, I think that that carries over even in the highest areas of politics. We always speak of the situation as sort of a honeymoon for a while in politics after an election. The President generally has a period of, an era of good feeling with the Congress and I think the same pertains to the country.

MR. ABERNATHY: Wouldn't this be even more the case with a change of party that a Republican President would have this?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: No. I don't think so. I

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1 think that it also relates to the personality of the individual.
2 It is very difficult for a man to talk of himself without
3 appearing self-serving. But, I believe that my life has been
4 devoted primarily to a spirit of reconciliaton. I have never
5 considered myself to be an angry man. Most of my friends have
6 the feeling that -- I have many weaknesses, I am sure, but
7 one of them possibly is that I am a little bit too compassionate.

8 I feel that there is a spirit of good will in this
9 country that can be called upon. I have a basic faith in the
10 qualities of decency of the American people. I think those
11 qualities are there.

12 Like all of us we have good and bad. You can play
13 upon the people's fears and in fact, bring out their animal
14 instincts or you can play upon the people's hopes and their
15 sense of decency and their goodness and bring out what I
16 consider their greatness. I believe that I can do that.

17 I have had experience in life as a mayor of a city and
18 in the Senate, I think that is a record. That is not a
19 theory. In the Senate, a leader of the Senate where I was
20 able to work with people of all political persuasion. I
21 believe there was very little animosity. We had people that
22 disagreed but if I can claim one thing as a Majority Whip
23 of the Senate, one of the leaders of the Senate of the United
24 States, was that I had the good will and the fellowship of
25 those even with whom I disagreed.

MR. ABERNATHY: Wouldn't you agree, wouldn't you agree
now that the most important thing that has to be done towards
unifying this country is to end the war?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I am sure that ending the
war would do a great deal to reunite our nation, to do away or
at least to minimize some of the bitterness that is present,
particularly amongst young people, and whoever is the next
President of the United States, if this war is not well on its
way to being reduced in terms of its intensity and on the road
to a negotiated settlement, whoever is elected must have as
his first priority to do everything within his authority, within
his talents and his power to bring about a political and
negotiated political settlement of this war and I am prepared
to take that leadership.

MR. BROKAW: On this subject, Mr. Vice President, you
have been talking about more significant negotiation before the
first of the year. Can you explain precisely what you mean?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I have a feeling about it.
That feeling is based upon what has transpired lately.

First of all, the two political parties, the major
political parties, have had their conventions. The platform
has been adopted in both parties. The candidates have been
selected. I believe now that Hanoi would feel that they have
every bit as good a chance of getting a reasonable settlement

1 in this war between now and January 20th as they would
2 after January 20th. In other words, they are not likely to get
3 any concessions out of the major political party candidates
4 now that they can't get at the conference table in Paris. Nor
5 are they likely to get any concessions after January 20th that
6 they can't get now at the conference table in Paris.

7 I happen to believe that in both, well, if Mr. Nixon,
8 Mr. Wallace and myself and whoever else may be in this
9 contest will make it clear to Hanoi that the time to stop the
10 fighting is now, that a cease fire is desired now, that
11 negotiations should take place now, and the killing should
12 stop now, if we make that very clear it will be a contribution
13 to what I want, namely, a politically negotiated settlement of
14 this war.

15 MR. BROKAW: Do you see any significant unilateral
16 de-escalation of the war on the part of the United States?

17 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I have said that
18 if the Army, that is, the Army of the South Vietnamese Republic,
19 can continue its very steady progress in training and equip-
20 ment and in combat effectiveness, it will then be able to do a
21 better job in self-defense or in defense of the Republic of
22 South Vietnam, and that is what it ought to do. We ought to
23 be pushing hard to see that the better than 800,000 who are now
24 in the military forces of South Vietnam are better motivated,
25 have better motivation, better equipment, better training,
26 better command, and we are doing that, and as they become
27 better, we ought to be able to reduce on a very systematic and
28 careful basis our own participation in this struggle.

29 I have said that I would hope that we might be able
30 to make at least some kind of a reduction in early 1969 or
31 even possibly in late 1968.

32 Now, that is based on hope and also upon the fact
33 that there is an improvement in the ARVN.

34 MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, I must interrupt
35 for just a moment. We will resume in just a moment.

36 MR. ABERNATHY: Resuming now, Mr. Vice President --
37 Peter?

38 MR. BURNS: Mr. Vice President, you had mentioned
39 perhaps off the cuff yesterday that you could have accepted
40 the minority plank in the Democratic National Convention.
41 Then, you backed down upon perhaps realization that it called
42 for an unconditional bombing halt. How do you feel about that
43 today?

44 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: The question as I recall
45 it -- and it was in one of these give and takes which I think
46 is a healthy thing in American politics, and may I just divert
47 for a minute to say I hope to be able to conduct my campaign
48 in a very open way, not just fixed speeches but what I call
49 the politics of confrontation, politics of citizen participa-

1 tion, just come one, come all, I will try to provide some
2 reasonable and responsive answers. I realize there are some
risks in that and I run them every day.

3 The question was, could I accept a minority plank in
4 the platform of the Democratic Party. Now, I said prior to
5 the convention that I would support the nominee of our party.
6 I expected the possibility that either Mr. McCarthy, my friend,
7 Senator McCarthy, or Senator McGovern might get that nomina-
8 tion, and it could be that I wouldn't succeed. I said I
9 would support them even though we had known differences on
10 Vietnam. I didn't think those differences were fundamental.
11 I thought they were tactical. I didn't think they were
12 necessarily fundamental differences. I thought there were
13 many more things that united us than divided us.

14 Now, the minority plant called for an unconditional
15 cessation of the bombing.

16 MR. ABERNATHY: Immediate?

17 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: It didn't say immediate.
18 It said an uncondition cessation of the bombing, but it also
19 said that it would want to take care that the troops in
20 the south were protected so that there wouldn't be undue injury
21 to them. It sort of -- well, it sort of pasted or painted over
22 some of the real problems that we have.

23 Now, let me make it quite clear, if that platform
24 had been adopted and I had been the nominee of the party, the
25 platform would have been the platform of my party but like with
some other matters, I would have felt the obligation and indeed,
the right to make my own interpretation and my own elaboration
of that platform. I thought the majority plant was a desirable
plank. I thought it was the better of the two. We might
have been able to even design a better plank than the majority
or the minority but in the choice between the two, I supported
the majority plank.

I continue to support that position of the majority
plank. I feel that it would have been more difficult for me
to run on a platform with the minority plant but as the
candidate I would have felt perfectly free to speak my views,
as I did in my acceptance speech. For example, despite the
majority plant in the platform I said in my acceptance speech
that I would not feel bound by the policies of yesterday to
deal with the realities of tomorrow, and I made it clear
that that could apply and would apply to Vietnam as well as
other things.

Now, why did I say that? Because no man has the
gift of prophesy. HI cannot predict what kind of a world we
are going to have on January 20th or even what the situation
is going to be in Vietnam. And I wanted to have a free hand.

If I become President of the United States I want the
people of the United States to know that every policy that we

1 have will be reexamined, reevaluated, reassessed as to whether
2 or not it meets the current needs and whether or not it is designed
3 to meet what I consider to be the needs of the future.

4 MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, may I follow up
5 on something there? Do you think there is any possibility
6 that the United States will stop all the bombing of North
7 Vietnam between now and election day?

8 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I think it is very difficult
9 for me to make a statement like that. I know that if the
10 United States has any reason to believe that stopping all of
11 the bombing north of the demilitarized zone will produce more
12 substantive discussions in Paris, that I am convinced that
13 the bombing would be stopped.

14 MR. BROKAW: What about reciprocal military action
15 on the part of North Vietnam?

16 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: You know, these words
17 reciprocity, restraint and reasonable response are used rather
18 freely. I believe that you must go back to the President's
19 message of March 31st when he made his all-important decision
20 on the unilateral action on reducing the bombing and removing
21 himself from contest for political office where he said that
22 almost any little thing, almost any little thing would produce
23 a total cessation of the bombing.

24 I think we all have to understand that what he is
25 really asking for is some evidence of good faith. To reduce
the bombing or to stop the bombing within itself is not the
central question. The question is if you reduce it or if you
stop it, total cessation, will you get a closer -- will you
get closer to peace? Will it mean that you have substantive
discussions that lend themselves to a political settlement?
That is all we are talking about.

None of us are against stopping the bombing. We want
to just make sure as to its timing and as to its results.

MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, earlier you said
you thought, you suggested as I heard you that you and Mr.
Nixon and former Governor Wallace should get together and make
some kind of joint statement to North Vietnam about what the
position of the United States is about settling that war. Now,
would you elaborate on this? Will you tell me what you had in
mind?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: What I had in mind was that
I believe that everything that we do during this campaign period
of partisan debate which is often misunderstood in foreign
circles, that whatever we do should lend itself to success or
progress at the conference table by our negotiators in Paris.
I want it to be perfectly clear that the debates that take
place here in no way will weaken our resolve on the battlefield
or at the conference table in Paris, and, therefore, I would
suggest that it might be helpful to the cause of a political

1 settlement, to effective negotiations, if all of us would say
2 that you will get no concessions after January 20th that you
3 can't get before January 20th, so negotiate. Stop the
fighting. Get on with the business of bringing peace.

4 I do not want a word of mine to lengthen this struggle.
5 I do not want anything that I say to result in any feeling
in Hanoi that if they just continue the killing, maybe if
6 Hubert Humphrey is elected President, that they will get a better
7 deal out of him than they can get now.

8 I think that Hanoi has got to be brought to under-
9 stand that this is a cruel and ugly war, that no one is
10 asking for unconditional surrender, that it needs and requires
11 a political settlement, that we are prepared to walk the extra
12 mile to get that political settlement and that the fighting
13 should stop and the negotiation should become meaningful and
14 substantive.

15 MR. ABERNATHY: How do you propose such a joint
16 statement to Mr. Nixon and Governor Wallace?

17 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I have suggested it in
18 somewhat these same terms but I would resuggest it here in this
19 instance, sir, because it is not a political gimmick. Very
20 frankly, I think that we cannot afford to play politics with
21 vietnam. I am sure that all of us want peace in Vietnam. I
22 am sure that Mr. Nixon wants it. I know that I want it. Mr.
23 Wallace's views are not as clear to me but I don't consider
24 Mr. Wallace to be a major political candidate. I think he is
25 an important political candidate but I think the main contest
is between the two political parties, Republican and Democratic
and between myself and Mr. Nixon.

I do believe, however, that while we undoubtedly
have shades of difference -- I think Mr. Nixon is a little
harder line than I am -- that I believe it would be to the benefit
of the men in the field, to this country, to the cause of
peace if we would make very clear to Hanoi that we are united
in this country in the determination to find a peaceful settle-
ment.

MR. ABERNATHY: In some kind of joint statement by
the candidates?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Ybs, yes.

MR. BROKAW: Does that mean also that the message
you are trying to get across to Hanoi that the policy of the
war will continue in the same vein that it has after January
20th?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: What I am trying to get
across to Hanoi is that this cruel war, costly to them and
costly to us, should be brought to an end, that no one is
being asked to be humiliated, that no one is asking for uncon-
ditional surrender, that we are not contemplating massive esca-
lation, that what we are contemplating is thoughtful, meaning-

1 ful negotiation and it is a plea to the decency of the world
2 frankly, as well as to the sensibilities of the regime in
3 Hanoi to stop the fighting, stop the killing, start the
4 talking and get on with the cause of peace.

5 MR. BROKAW: Mr. Vice President, if nothing happens
6 between now and January 20th, if Hanoi does not take your
7 cue, do you have any kind of time table in your own mind about
8 what the negotiations should accomplish, what we should do in
9 Vietnam if no negotiations take place after the inauguration
10 of the President?

11 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I don't think it
12 would be very wise for the man that seeks to be the President
13 of the United States to outline a foreign policy after January
14 20th at this particular stage of his campaign, particularly
15 in light of the delicate situation in Vietnam. I believe
16 that what we ought to be doing now is concentrating our atten-
17 tion on the months between now and January 20th to get this
18 peace, and I just am not going to talk in any way that will
19 jeopardize those efforts.

20 I, I am elected President of the United States, I
21 will pursue with every talent and power in my command the cause
22 of a just and an enduring peace not only in Vietnam but
23 throughout the world, including arms control limitation,
24 including the building of regional organization, to hopefully
25 build a more secure world, but those are the general outlines
of my policy.

MR. BROKAW: I wonder if we could talk parochial
politics for a moment. In view of what happened here in
California, that you finished third in the primary and you
personally finished fourth among the delegation at the conven-
tion, and over the weekend the Mexican-American Political
Association said they wouldn't endorse your candidacy, the
conservatives in California said they wouldn't endorse your
candidacy, in view of all that aren't the chances for the Humphrey-
Muskie ticket in California quite dim at this moment?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, for those of the casual
and regular normal observation I suppose that would be the case,
but may I say I was the first elected Democrat of the United
States Senate in a 100 years in Minnesota. I was the first
elected Mayor of the City of Minneapolis from 1917 to 1945
that was a Democrat. I am accustomed to doing things that other
people can't do or don't do. I haven't the slightest doubt that
we are going to carry this state. I cannot believe the State
of California, which knows Mr. Nixon so well, is going to vote
for Mr. Nixon. They may not be happy with me, everybody, but
it is a choice between Wallace, Nixon and myself and while
those choices may not be all that everybody would like, I imagine
that most people will want to vote, I hope they will take their
citizenship seriously and vote and particularly in the State of

1 California where they know the former Vice President so well.
2 I would expect that we would do quite well because my record
3 will speak for itself to all the liberal voters of this state
4 and I think to all voters that believe that you need a govern-
ment of humaneness and compassion and want an economy that is
going to continue to grow.

5 MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, what do you want
President Johnson to do in your campaign?

6 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I want the President
7 first of all, to do everything he can to get peace in Vietnam,
8 not merely for me but for the nation, for the world. I think
that is his number one objective. I know that is what he
believes and anything that he does should be secondary to that
objective.

9 MR. ABERNATHY: Do you think he could be helpful to
you by going out into the country and speaking for you?

10 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes, I do.

11 MR. ABERNATHY: Have you asked him to do this?

12 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I think there would be
13 areas in which the President would be very helpful, in fact, in
14 any part of the country. I have in mind maybe to get some --
15 maybe we should inform him on this program.

16 MR. ABERNATHY: Please do.

17 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I surely have in mind
18 asking the President to be of help to me in this campaign. I
19 gather he has some indication of that already. Our relationships
20 are warm and cordial. They are the relationships of two men
21 who have been together in politics over 20 years, so
22 we have very few secrets.

23 MR. ABERNATHY: Would you ask him to go out and
campaign for you?

24 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: There will be times that he
25 will be called upon but not at the expense of what he is really
trying to do for this country, that is, the solution to the
war in Vietnam.

MR. ABERNATHY: Would you ask him, for instance, to
campaign in California?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Don't you think we ought to
kind of get a program worked out a little later? My staff
gets very angry when I start to program myself and others.

MR. BURNS: You have only got eight weeks.

MR. BROKAW: Will you or have you talked to Senator
McCarthy about --

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes, I did before the
convention, sir. I have not talked to the Senator since the
convention. It is my hope and intention to do so. I know that
the Senator has serious problems about support of my
candidacy, but he is a man of good will. We have worked
together for better than 20 years. We had voted together so
many times on so many things. It is inconceivable to me that

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we wouldn't be together when the choice is between Mr. Wallace, Mr. Nixon and myself. I do not believe that my friend, Senator McCarthy, wants George Wallace to decide this election. I do not believe that he wants Richard Nixon to be President of the United States. I do believe that after 20 years, better than that, 23 years of friendship, comradeship in politics and in social life, that he will want to help he. I hope he can see it in his heart to do so.

I sure don't believe that anybody can pressure him. He is a man of conscience and conviction. I will just rely on what I consider his basic good decency and his good will.

MR. BURNS: How long can Senator McCarthy wait? How long can you wait for his support?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Oh, well, whenever it comes it will be appreciated.

MR. BURNS: Only eight weeks left.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I know, my good friend, but this media you have here called television and radio and the press and other means of communication, endorsements come and are very helpful to me. I have been visited by many people, Steve Mitchell, Campaign Manager, Convention Manager for Senator McCarthy, was one of the first to call me and pledge his support. The liberal party in New York, who passed a plank on Vietnam that is more dovish than the minority plank that was in the battle, the Democratic Convention, the liberal party overwhelmingly endorsed the candidacy, my candidacy and that of Senator Muskie. Ted Kennedy, a very great Senator, my very dear friend, just yesterday endorsed my candidacy. We are getting support from the McCarthy people, Kennedy people, all across the country, and I will tell you why, because they are making their choices.

I don't parade before the American people as a man without any blemishes. I am a human being. I am a mortal. I have been in politics a long time. I have engendered some affection among some and some admiration among some, some respect among some, and I have engendered some opposition and some feeling of difference among some. I know that. I don't come to the American people and say, look, here is the perfect man. I am a human being, a mortal who has been in politics, not infallible. I am fallible.

I hope that I can do a good job. I think that my experience and my background and my training has given me a sense of maturity, a sense of reason, and restraint and responsiveness which this country can use now. That is my honest view of it and I intend to put it to work to try to heal the wounds in this country, try to direct the energy of this country towards one nation, towards a united people, not necessarily of one mind but of one spirit. I think I can do something about it. If I didn't feel that way, I would get

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1 out.

2 MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President, on this question
3 of reuniting, healing the wounds, there is great hostility,
4 great anger between groups in this country. Do you think that
5 this can ever be eased and put away until the war is ended?

6 VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I said earlier that I think
7 the ending of the war would be of great help but I don't think
8 that is all that it is. I do not think it is just the war.
9 We have gone through, Bob, some very, very difficult, turbulent
10 times. There have been more changes take place in this
11 country and in this world in the last generation, last decade,
12 than in the preceding 1000 years. The changes that have
13 taken place from the world society to the metropolitan
14 industrialized society, the changes that have taken place in
15 race relations, these have been very difficult changes for the
16 American people in many areas to accept. The wonder of it all
17 is that we have created a political and social system that has
18 been able to stand this turbulence, this ferment, and still
19 hold itself together.

20 I happen to be one of those that believes that
21 while there are extremists on the right, to the left, in the
22 black community, in the white community, you always find those
23 that experience the change and particularly dramatic change,
24 that there is a great body, not just in the center but a
25 great body that goes across the spectrum of American society
that believes that things can be worked out peacefully, that
wants to sit around a table like we have here and reason it
out. We, I am sure, disagree on many things but we don't
need to fight it out. We can reason it out.

I intend to appeal to that sense of reason, sense
of decency. I intend to arouse a silent majority to be
articulate, a working, meaningful majority in this country.
I think we can do it.

MR. ABERNATHY: Mr. Vice President -- I am sorry,
Tom.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Are we all through?

MR. ABERNATHY: We thank you very much. It has been
a great talk.

Thank you.

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