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"THE WOMEN ASK THE PRESIDENT"

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Wednesday, October 24, 1956

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PARTICIPANTS:

THE HONORABLE DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER,
President of the United States



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Members of the Panel:

Mrs. Louis Martin, Salisbury, Maryland
Mrs. Mary Lanuti, Oliphant, Pennsylvania
Mrs. Margarite Laurianti, Cleveland, Ohio
Mrs. Helen Dormitzer, Chicago, Illinois
Mrs. Violet Byg, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Mrs. Catherine Marshall, Washington, D. C.
Miss Beverly Barr, Rochester, New York

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ANNOUNCER: Today in the Nation's Capital, President

Dwight D. Eisenhower and Mrs. Eisenhower are meeting a group of women from all over the country. The President has never met these women until today nor has he seen any of the questions they will ask, questions about many of the issues that affect all women and their families.

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THE PRESIDENT: Ladies, I am grateful that you should take time to come in today to talk over with me some of the critical questions of the day. There was a time, you know, when they called this a man's world, but at least in the political scene this has long ago ceased to be true. In the last election we found that 52 percent of the votes were cast by women and they instantly demonstrated that far from being confined to managing their homes they were going to have a big voice in managing the Government.



So today in order to get at some of the things that may be on your minds I suggest we handle it sort of like a press conference and each of you ask a question in turn and I think it would be best just to start on the left and we go in turn right around. If that's all right we'll start with you.

MISS BEVERLY BARR: Mr. President, my name is Beverly Barr. I'm from Rochester, New York. I teach government and history in one of our public high schools and I am voting this year in my first presidential election.

First of all speaking for the ladies I would like to say that we are very definitely amateurs on television and

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so we have brought our notes with us. I hope this will be allowable.

The first question I would like to ask you concerns military training of many of my friends and my brother who is now a college senior are facing the question of future military training. To my students in high school the question of will they have to go in the Service and how long is of paramount importance to them as well as to their parents in planning for their future educational career. I would like to know if you could tell me how long you think it will be necessary for us to have a draft?



THE PRESIDENT: Well, if I should try to predict how long you would have the draft would be really using a crystal ball, and I don't think I'd be justified in talking about it in terms of what's news.

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This draft is brought about by conditions. First of all we are a prosperous nation -- young men don't like to go in the army. They have greater opportunities to get their career started and firmly living in the civil world. On the outside we are the world of tension, one in which it is necessary that America be very careful, cautious, prudent and vigilant.



Now, this means that we must have training because if these young men are ever called upon to serve--not necessarily war, but say in some kind of emergency overseas to keep the peace they must know something of discipline and training because in this modern world, in this modern type of army, training isn't picked up over night. So for him to be able to do his duty and take care of himself he needs some training.

As of now, we have about three million people under arms. Experience has shown time and again we can't keep more than about a million five on a voluntary basis. So what the draft does, which we try to keep as small as possible in the monthly calls is, first of all, to provide that extra group and secondly, it increases the voluntary enlistments because

ew through voluntary enlistment a man gets a greater choice.

Now, what I should say this -- there's a very wide variety of training a boy can take, you know, with the six months' volunteer training and then going into Reserves or he can wait his call or he can enlist and so arrange his discharge of this obligation of performance of duty with the least possible disruption of his educational life.

MISS BEVERLY BARR: Thank you.

MRS. LOUIS MARTIN: Mr. President, I am Irene Martin from Allen, Maryland, and the mother of twelve children and seventeen grandchildren.

I would like to know what -- I am really worried over this, so much talk of this atomic bomb, the H-bomb. I would like to know what is the future of our families in this atomic age.

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Well, again you've asked a very serious and important question. There is no question about it. The world must find peaceful solutions for the problems that used to be turned over to the arbiter of war. We never can have a hydrogen war, as I see it, and still have a civilization such as we now know.

It's absolutely mandatory that progress be made, and anyone who shuts their eyes to this fact will, by doing so, deny their faith in the ability of men trying to do this, and so will not be helping. All of us must help, not just the leaders -- everybody; all of us.

Now, as to the hydrogen bomb, itself, if we are going to remain secure in the type of world we have now, with aggression always possible, we must talk, we must urge agreement from a position of strength. Strength can cooperate with its neighbors and with other people; weakness cannot. Weakness can only retreat. So part of that strength is the bombs, because they prevent war, as we see it. They are the deterrent that warns any aggressor, "Don't attack us, because it would be suicidal."

We know on our part that we are a free government. People



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in our country determine whether or not we should ever go to war. Therefore, we know we are not going to start a war. It's only those countries where such decisions can rest in the hands of a few men who, in their reckless seeking after world power, might launch such a catastrophe on the world. We shall never do it. Therefore, it's a defensive weapon with us, a deterrent to war and not, we are not seeking a way to destroy civilization, I assure you.



MRS. LANUTI: Mr. President, my name is Mrs. May Lanuti. I come from Oliphant, Pennsylvania, which is a small mining community. We also have other industry there; we are very, very prosperous, and due to your Administration, Mr. President, we feel very secure, we think it's a very good, sound government, we'd like to keep it that way.

My husband is affiliated with the union; he's a laborer, and there is talk going around about a depression. That's what I would like to know, Mr. President: Is there any truth in that?

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, now, again, let's try to be perfectly truthful.

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Our economy is a rather delicately balanced mechanism, and always there are pressures that are trying to push it toward inflation, like rising prices and cheapening money, and there are other pressures that are trying to push you toward scarce money and deflationary avenues.

The purposes of Government -- and this includes the Federal Reserve Board, which is an independent agency in the management of our money -- the purpose of that whole Government is to do its part so that these forces keep rather balanced and you keep a stable cost of living for example.

The cost of living, you know, for some reason has gone up very rapidly. In this last three and a half years we have been unable to stop it but we have made it rise so slow that it really becomes, we can call it, a stable area. The cost of living has gone up, although -- I just had a figure just before I came in here. The cost of food, general cost of food across the board this last month was exactly the same it was January 1952, and this in spite of the fact -- You know, you ladies are buying a lot of built-in maid service with your food these days, you buy food that are all prepared and ready to go into the pot, some of them frozen, and that's the way you get



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them.

Now, this is all I can say about the prospects:

All of the economic factors or the preponderant number of the economic factors point toward a continuation of good times, possibly not the exact height you have it now, but in that general level.

And this I can certainly assure you: If there are any signs show up that it looks like we are going the other way, everything the Government can do, every single force and influence it has to bring to bear, will be brought in timely fashion and not after any such catastrophe occurs.



I really believe that with social security payments, with unemployment insurance, with all the kind of things now that are available to someone who is temporarily out of work, our chance of getting a spiral deflation are much less than they ever were, because the purchasing power is equal -- stays up through those means.


So, I really can assure you, so far as my own convictions are concerned, you are not going to witness any great deflation and depression.

MRS. LANUTI: Thank you, Mr. President.

MRS. LAURIANTO: Mr. President, I am Margarite

Laurianti of Cleveland, Ohio. I own and operate a small beauty shop business. Now, I come in contact with a lot of these women who do have small businesses. Now, some of my friends say that the wealth in this country wants to do away with small business.

Can you give me your thoughts on this subject?

THE PRESIDENT: Once in a while, you know, you are charged with something that's sort of this order: "Well,  the sun of not shining." And you know it very well is, and you are almost speechless in trying to answer. I know of no one in this country that wants to do away with small business. Every big businessman at one time was a small businessman. It's the lifeblood of our whole economy, just exactly as the family is a unit of our whole social order and civilization.

We have -- I just got the figures the other day from the Attorney General. They are not beyond '55.

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We instituted 54 suits for

antitrust action to keep these big businesses from getting in such a dominant position that they can squeeze out the little fellow. Now, it is true, we want many of the things that big business give us. We have the cheapest and best cars in the world. We get televisions that are the best and -- and probably be the cheapest in comparison with our standard of living than anybody in the world. Why? Because their great organizations make them. But we do try to keep those people from getting that influence over our economy that can override the little fellow no matter what the size of his business or what type it is.

I assure you that its a -- its something that takes the -- well, the tension and the constant work of quite a group in the Executive Department as well as in the Legislative.

Only in August we put -- we put out a new 14 point program, a little part of which needs a legislative approval. The rest of it is already in action. Loosening of credit; getting a method of reducing taxes for the smaller businesses and so on, which we will have to go to Congress for; other things of that kind and I am sure you will see a continuation

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of the opportunities for a small business person.

MRS. HELEN DORMITZER: Thank you, Mr. President.

MRS. VIOLET BYG: Mr. President, I am Mrs. Violet Byg from South Dakota. I am a farm wife. We own and we operate our farm. We have five children and we like our way of life.

Now, in our area there has been much adverse publicity about the farmer's plight, as they say, and the question that I would ask is: What is the true picture of the farmer's outlook in this America of ours?



THE PRESIDENT: Well, of course, I think the outlook is very good. We have had an eight-year decline in farm prices while the farmers had to pay along with all other America a gradually increasing cost for the things they buy. So the farmer has been in general caught in what we call a price squeeze and it has not been a good time.

Now, so far as Government can affect this whole business we tried and have tried for a long time with wartime rigid price supports which, after the war was over, and we didn't need quite so much of those basic crops, kept piling them up in surplus until there were at the rate, I think, nine billion

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dollars worth in storage at one time and costing us one billion -- one million dollars a day to store them none of you farmers weren't getting that. It wasn't coming to you at all.

So that's the kind of thing we've had and that's just been like a dark cloud hanging over the price market and it's not been healthy. Now, this last year, right now, in these last six months prices have started back up. '56 is the first year except for one of the Korean War years when prices have gone up in the farm business since World War II. They've gone up about 6 percent and with the opening up of world markets we're working on so hard with the cutting down of these surpluses with the Soil Bank to help out, I personally believe the outlook is much better than its been in the last ten years.



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MRS. VIOLET BYG: Thank you.

MRS. CATHERINE MARSHALL: I am Catherine Marshall,
and I'm from Washington, D. C.

The question I'd like to ask you is one that I have
long wanted to ask you, face to face, and this has absolutely
nothing to do with politics. I hope you won't mind that.

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. It will be a relief,
in fact.

(Laughter)



MRS. MARSHALL: I remember reading several places
about an incident that's supposed to have happened when you
were a young boy when, according to the story, you had blood
poisoning and the family physician felt that you were probably
going to die unless your leg was taken off.

And, as I remember the story, you stationed your
brother Milton outside the door and told him that no matter
how high your temperature rose or how delirious you got, they
were not to take off the leg. And then the family, the rest of
the family gathered in the downstairs parlor to pray about this.

I have always wanted to ask you, is that story
apocryphal or is it really true?

THE PRESIDENT: It is -- of all the stories told

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about me, that one comes the closest to be told in accurate terms, of any I know. There is one or two slight errors. This sickness went on for about almost three weeks, and most of the time I was delirious. Byt I had my sane moments; I still remember that.

(Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, the brother was not Milton, who's ten years younger than I; it was Edgar, who was older and was quite an athlete and I could trust him to take care of -- (laughter) -- and the other was this:

It was, the doctor did want to take off my leg because he thought it was necessary. But you must remember boys in those days were raised for one -- two things: work, and then they made their play, and if you couldn't play baseball and box and play football, why, your life was ended. That was in our boyish minds.

And so, I was very desparate about this, and this brother, who was an athlete and who played on the same teams I did, understood it. And so he promised and he stuck right there. But now, my father and mother were very deeply religious people and, of course, they prayed through this. But there is --

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don't recall is that he carried only four counties out of 102 in the State of Illinois. And that's one reason we feel very sure about your election.

But my great concern, I think, and the concern of women all over the country is that we see to it that we elect a Congress who will support the President, and I would like you to say today just how important you think this is.



THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say this: As you can well imagine, Mamie and I, having wanted our own home, live in our own home, for these many years, would never have consented to again stand for this job unless we thought there was something to do.

That something to do has been outlined in the several State of the Union Messages I have sent to the Congress, and the programs that have been outlined, and most of you, I think, are fairly well acquainted with their broad general character.

Now, those things, as I see it, must be done for the good of America. They affect both the foreign field and the domestic field.

As a matter of fact, these two fields are so inter-related, I sometimes think it is a little foolish to talk about

them in separate categories. We must be strong at home if we are going to be strong abroad. We understand that. So we want to be strong at home in our morale or in our spirit, we want to be strong intellectually, in our education, in our economy and, where necessary, militarily.

Now, it is to advance that strength at home, to establish our position abroad a little more firmly and with a, what I call, the moderate system of government abroad, being very careful not to interfere with people more than is necessary, but do for them those things which they cannot, in our civilization, do for themselves.

I believe that that philosophy must be firmly fixed, and that is what we are trying to do. To do that, if we are going to have the two-party system in our country, it seems to me vastly important that the Executive and Legislative Departments be in the hands of -- handled by the same party at any one time. This, for the reason, then you can fix responsibility.

Look in the campaign today. One side says, "See what we did," and the other side says, "More of our people voted for it than yours did." And that is the kind of argument



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we now have when, as I see it, if you have both the
Legislative and the Executive in the hands of the same party,
you can say, "You were in power and you did not," or "You
did do."

And I think that is really what the two-party
system should mean in our country. So, to answer your
question specifically, I think it is important, indeed I do.

MRS. DORMITZER: Thank you very much.

MISS BARR: Mr. President, I want to tell you that
in our county we have an extremely active Young Republican
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We do a lot of work and we have a lot of good times and we are an extremely large group. And I wonder if you think you could give us your thought as to what there is about the Republican Party that attracts particularly the younger voter.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if I could be personal for a moment, I've lived my life with young people. I lived with them in the Army. The armies and the military forces are all normally made up of young people. Only a few of the old generals and colonels don't fit in that category.



I learned for them a tremendous respect. I hold for them the greatest admiration. Moreover, as I tried to look into the future as this war was drawing to its close, it seemed to me that the people are going to be more effective than anyone else was these young people around me. I remember in the very first talk I made after the World War -- it was in Britain in June of 1945 -- I tried to bring this out: What are we going to do about this business of promoting peace? And that the young people of your age ought to get into this because, as I tried to explain, if you're lucky you still own about sixty years of America. If I am very lucky, I own fifteen or twenty at the most, you see.

You are -- you've got an interest that stretches way out entire²⁰-
ly aside from any that may come after you, your own personal
interest is very deep in this.

Now, I have tried to emphasize this, I have told the
Republican Party time and again if they didn't attract young
people, they weren't getting the right recruits because you
can vote in about fifteen Presidential elections; I can vote
maybe in two or three more. It is just good sense to have
the youngsters. Besides, they are the ones that are going to
have to live with us.

Now, I would beg of these youngsters not to
decry the wisdom of experience but taking that experience,
strike out boldly for themselves and make the kind of world
they want to. And I just think they should do it. You
know, I'm one of those that really believes we should allow
voting a little younger than we do for a very definite reason.

I don't think the United States should put its safety
in time of war in the hands of people who have no word
at all about how it started and how its going to be conducted.
So I used to say in the war, if the man's old enough to fight
he's old enough to vote. Now that means fighting



at about the age of 19. I thought that was a good age, but whatever -- I still think if we're going to put him in the Army he ought to be allowed to vote by that time. Of course, that's up to the States, not to the Federal Government. But everything that we do must be forward-looking, not backward. Let's don't look back and say, "Who is responsible for this or that war or that depression, or anything else;" let's look ahead and see where we're going. And that, I think, is the viewpoint.



MRS. MARTIN: Mr. President, there is a lot of talk about different things going on in the country, but what we would like to know -- know, is -- how it is that this Administration has been able to have increased employment during a peace period when you only had increased employment during the Democratic Administration?

THE PRESIDENT: Any political party that would take to itself exclusive credit for the development and advancement of America is not being truthful, or it's fooling itself. Here is what a Government can do. All these public functions, such as the management of money and of the Federal Budget, of these handling of these great governmental activities on

efficient and effective basis and not duplicating, not hiring and filling up extra jobs all over the place. All of that is part of efficient Government, but aside from that the Government must create confidence. Our private enterprise is build upon this basis. She can start a business. Because why? She could make a profit and then she could pay her people well and she wants to pay them well, because then they go to other businesses and buy things and that all comes back again to her because then someone can get their hair curled one day oftener or one week oftener -- whatever it is. Now our whole progress is achieved by the people themselves working in the greatest amount of freedom you can give them, but under a Government that encourages that. That means confidence. When you get confidence people start to invest. Lying behind the job her husband has is at least 15,000 dollars investment. Where does it come from? It comes from the confidence of people that will invest in the machinery and the facilities and things that give him a job. All the way through, we've got to have this confidence, not just in the President or in the Congress or in the whole Government or in a few people.



Its got to be in 168 million people. That is who must have it.

Then may we have good times. Now the Government must be watchful so the trend that gets started, as we were talking a little bit ago about possibilities of depressions and inflations, you try to keep things on a level keel because today you will be putting money in Social Security payments. When you get to the time you draw those payments you want those dollars to buy just as much if you can as they buy today.

That is the reason for this stability that you are always struggling for, and that is the answer as I see it. But it is the people that do it.

MRS. MARY LANUTI: Mr. President, coming back to labor, because that is what I am actually representing, I would like to know, too -- the opposition of stressing the fact about the taxes. Oh, the taxes didn't benefit labor or the little man that they call us, shall I say, but all they did was help corporations and the military.

Will you explain that to us?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I will give you one or two figures. In the years 1946 to 1952 the profits of corporations after taxes was 7.7 per cent of the gross national income. Since that



time from January, 1953 to this day, today those profits after taxes have been six per cent, so that the great corporations, far from profiting, have lost about in the order of fifteen or sixteen per cent of what they were getting.

Now, I personally resent this talk about little people. If there is any one little person in this country, then I am, because I am an American. That is the only thing I know.

I think all of us should say that, then we get away from this business of little people and big people. We are all necessary, your husband doing his job, she running a beauty shop, whatever we are doing. We are people that are contributing something to our society.

Now, what we want to do is to make sure everybody is rewarded properly and his load is carried not -- I mean, he is not given an unfair portion of the load to carry.

In the tax cut we had, which is about 7.4 billions, as I remember it, two-thirds of it went to individuals, and a much bigger per cent to the people that paid the lowest taxes than those who paid the highest.

People who paid the highest just got a little off,

and so on down, but two-thirds went to individuals and one-third to businesses of all kinds, including corporations.

Now, by doing that, that helped to create this confidence, build up the investment so that we get these jobs that makes the prosperity we are organized -- that we are experiencing right now.

The one thing, I think, that really annoys me more than anything else is to begin to refer to Americans as big Americans and little. I have friends at every walk of life. I have friends that are millionaires and I have friends that are out in my little town of Abilene, Kansas, where I was a barefoot boy, and they are just as dear to me as any millionaire I ever met, and I think this applies to every man worth his salt in this world.

MRS. MARY LANUTI: Thank you.

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MRS. LAURIANTI: Mr. President, I am not speaking for myself when I say this. I am speaking for women that I come in contact with.

Can you give us a picture of this unrest that we are now having with the Suez Canal?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, of course, the Mid-East is almost historically a center of unrest and discontent. You have the age-old quarrel between the Jews of the area and the Arabs of the area, and this is complicated by others, because the Christians also look upon Jerusalem as their Holy City, and so you have other complications.

But now because of the fact that the Arabs think that Israel was started by almost a violence, they are very, very antagonistic, and so they almost look for ways in which they can be, let's say, antagonistic. The same applies to the other side.

Now, on top of this, we have this Suez Canal, which we thought was all settled until 1968 because the Treaty of 1888 says that until 1968 it is going to be done this way. I think no one can challenge the legal right of Egypt to nationalize the Canal, but unquestionably there is involved in

ao2 it the point, not only the point of national prestige but the
point of personal prestige.

 So here you have got this great waterway on which
so much of the economy of the world depends, particularly all
of the shipping nations.

 For example, there is an average, I think, of
almost fifty ships a day goes through that waterway. The
commerce of the nation is dependent on it.

 Well, now, when these nations all see that passageway
sort of threatened, and their economy is threatened, which
would mean a depression of some kind for them, they get very
excited. We are not as heavily involved as are most, but still
I think we have about two and a half per cent of that, so it is
a very complicated question. You can talk on it all afternoon,
I assure you.

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