

1988 Presidential Election

Interviewer: Looking at the current polls, what advice would you give George Bush? Does he have a chance this fall?

Gerald R. Ford: Well, I would tell him he's better off than I was when we left Kansas City in 1976, we were thirty-three points behind. All the mathematicians on my staff said we had to change a hundred and seventy-thousand voters a day. Well, that was pretty heavy stuff. We came pretty close, less than two percent. As a matter of fact, I would tell George it's better to be ten percent behind at this point than ten percent ahead. It's harder to keep from sliding as you get closer and closer. It's a lot better to be a little behind so you can exhort the troops, so that you can work harder yourself, and that you can have a much more affirmative and aggressive campaign, and that's what I think Vice President Bush has to do.

Interviewer: What do you consider the leading issues of this fall's campaign?

Gerald R. Ford: Well, obviously, and here I'm prejudiced, I think both candidates have to come up with a responsible proposal to better manage our fiscal problems, and they're serious as I've tried to point out. I don't envy the winner facing the hard reality of our fiscal challenge. In addition, we certainly have other major domestic issues: the drug problem, the education. In the defense area, I think, we've got to continue the basic program that president Reagan has been successful in rejuvenating. But now I think we've got to be a little more discerning what weapon systems we agree on and what weapon systems we can fund in the months ahead. And I think there's going to be some discussion this fall on foreign policy.

It won't be too much of a different campaign from those in the past. I personally think this campaign will be decided like others on the economics issue. At least my experience is the bread and butter issue is the final one. And if you say that and it's true, George Bush ought to win. Although, I think it will be very close. The economy is healthy, and he can make point with pride to six years of an economic recovery. The voters across the land that I've observed and watched, the pocketbook issue is important. According to all the economists that I've listened to and read, we're going to have a healthy economy through 1988. That's a good issue, and I think the Vice President ought to talk about it.