

Steve Boerner

Fireside chat may be all the hot air Americans get

The President wasn't smiling. "But I wanted to talk about nuclear proliferation!" he said. "And inflation and unemployment and the Middle East and all that other big stuff."

He was maneuvered down the hall and into the Oval Office by his press agent. The networks were already there, stringing cables and assembling cameras.

There was a map of the United States on the wall. It was covered with lines and arrows.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy," the press agent said. "But you're going to have to talk about the weather tonight. Here's a pointer. That's to use with the map. So you can explain your fuel allocation program."

He glanced at his watch. "Only twenty minutes to air time. Jimmy, you're going to have to put some fire into this fireside chat. It might be all the hot air some people will get for a while. Remember that this is for the good ol' folks back home in Middle America."

"But they didn't even vote for me!" the President protested.

"That's why you're doing this in the first place. Here's the makeup crew."

Bundling up

An armload of sweaters, scarves, mittens and other assorted cold-weather wear was dumped on the carpet. "What's all that for?" the President asked.

"That's so you can stay warm. It was your idea to set back the thermostat, you know. Say, this sweater here

off, thousands of schools closed and 11 states close to disaster status."

Promises, promises

The President was thoughtful. He pulled the hat down over his ears.

"Why couldn't I just promise to bring warm weather?" he asked.

Frosty white puffs of breath obscured the press agent's face. "No, Jimmy. That might have worked fine during the campaign, but you're in office now. Besides, even if you did they'd say it was an early spring. You know the press. No faith. People expect action. Remember, Jimmy,

you're president now."

"It still feels good, too."

"You'll get used to it," the press agent sighed.

"Ten seconds to air time. Go to it, Jimmy. And don't forget to let them know *who you are*." He retreated to the back of the room.

The lights went up. The cameras moved in. The President broke into a smile.

"Hello," he said. "My name is Jimmy Carter . . ."

There was a small disturbance behind the cameras. The press agent had left in a hurry, and, carelessly, slammed the door.

warp nine

would look mighty good on you, Jimmy. Put it on. Even has a presidential seal embroidered on the front.

"Got your muffler on tight? Comfortable? Good. Now just put on these here mittens and let me adjust your fur hat. That looks pretty good."

"Mfflmffmml . . ."

"Jimmy, your pronunciation is really lousy. Move the scarf down a little, that might help. There."

"Couldn't we turn the thermostat up to 68 just for tonight?"

The press agent was aghast. "Are you kidding? That would damage the ol' credibility beyond repair, Jimmy boy. Heck no, you can't do that. People out there are cold. We can't let them see you all snug and warm here in the White House wearing nothing more than a business suit."

"Sorry. I must have lost my head. We've got to conserve."

"Right. I know that, and you know that. Now you have to tell *them* that the fuel shortage has to be spread out so they're *all* going to freeze." He pointed to the cameras.

"Let's go over the figures real quick: 8,900 industrial plants closed down, one-and-a-half million workers laid

letters

In band's defense

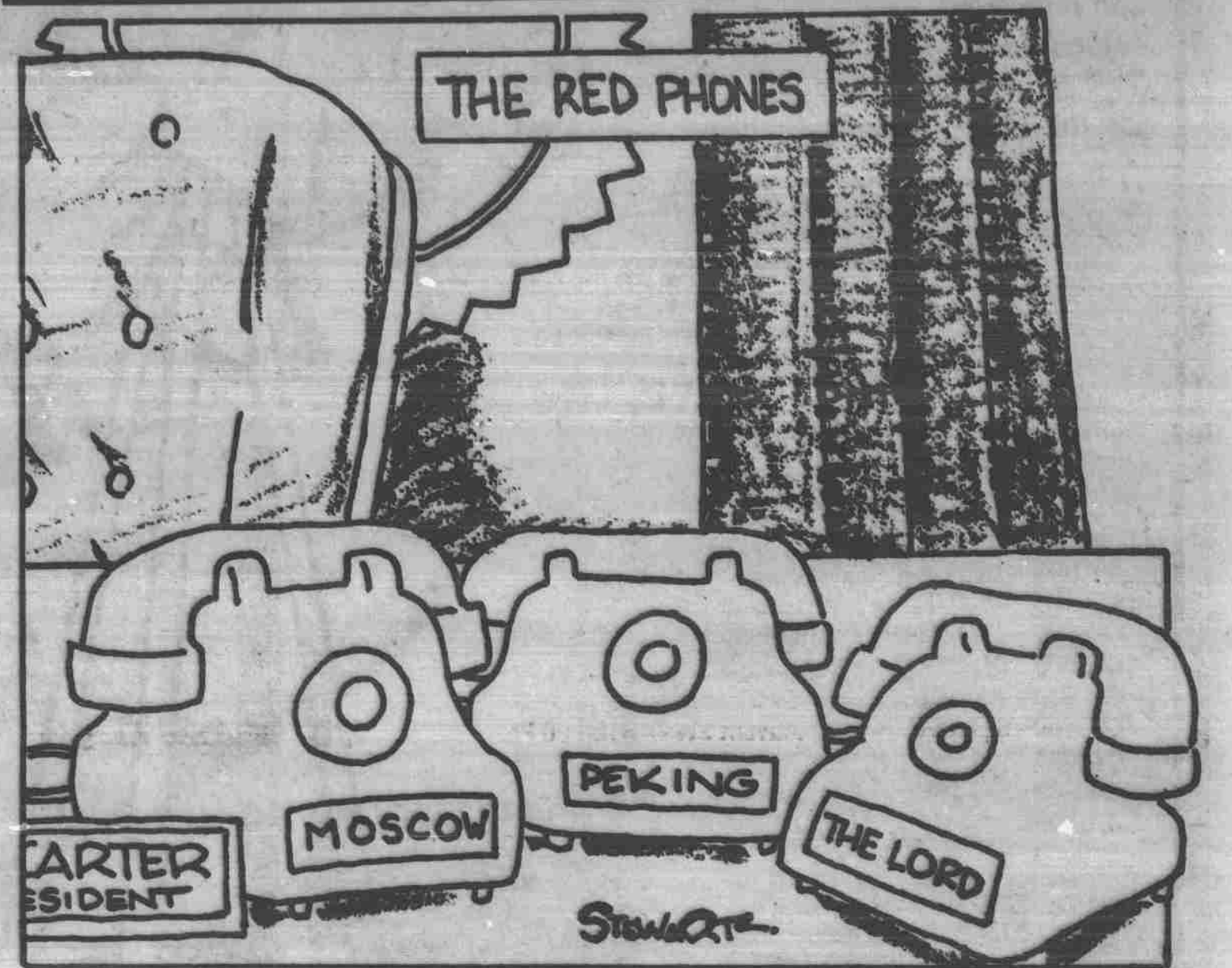
In reply to the letter by T. Forsman (Jan. 24) and others who feel the Nebraska Band should have been at the recent inauguration in Washington, I felt I should defend the Nebraska Band.

This is, first of all, very unlikely since the Nebraska band is representing the university (and also the state) and thus cannot go running off whenever we feel like it.

Secondly, I believe that the state should have been represented by a high school band, as most states were. The fact that none of the bands asked could raise the necessary funds should not be blamed on the Nebraska Band.

While in Houston, the Nebraska band was there because of generous fans who felt we should have been there supporting the team and representing the whole state. Obviously, there was not enough concern to send us to Washington, even if we could have gone.

Daie Irvin



Mary McGrory

Carter better with deeds than words

Jimmy Carter seemed to be trying to tell us something when he made his debut as a lay preacher in Washington. In his first week in the White House, he's done better with deeds than with words. He let his feet do the talking for him on Inauguration Day, and flinging open the great front doors of the Justice Dept. upon the advent of the new attorney general was worth 10 speeches on "the new spirit."

At the National Prayer Breakfast, the annual demonstration that God is not dead in Washington, Carter's text was humility—in individuals, in nations. Although

he never actually said so, he sounded as if he were suggesting that the time has come to admit that the Vietnam war, which he long supported, was a mistake.

It was all very cloudy and oblique and wrapped in Scripture quotations, but it could be read that way between the lines. "We insist we are the strongest and the bravest and the wisest and the best, but in that attitude,

we cover up and fail to acknowledge our mistakes . . . and in the process forgo the opportunity to search for a better life or a better country."

Soft answer

That could have been a soft answer to critics of his modest amnesty program, which, though expected, has provoked vehement protest.

The odd thing about all this is that these new protesters have come around to the old protesters' view—that the war was a mistake. Perhaps, in retrospect, if the peace movement had called the war "stupid" instead of "immoral," they might have had better luck with what was for so many years "the silent majority." It may have been the claim of superior virtue that grated to the point where Middle America came to hate the demonstrations more than the war itself.

It would be logical for the pardon foes, with their bitter, belated knowledge, to be grateful to those who tried to end the mistake, but that is perhaps too much to expect, and Jimmy Carter, who was for so long silent himself, is not asking them to be.

Perhaps the fact that "the other side"—even our officials felt a little self-conscious about calling them the enemy—was so plainly a peasant society only made their victory more intolerable to certain souls nurtured in the "Number One" and "they-can't-do-this-to-us" psychology which guided thinking from NSC meeting to blue-collar bar for almost 10 years.

"God be with you"

He can be subtle, this deacon who is now commander-in-chief. There was his seemingly random reference to the military. Among the thousands whom he and Mrs. Carter had greeted at the White House over the Inaugural weekend, the military officers, more than any of the others, had said, "God be with you."

House Democratic Leader Jim Wright of Texas, who preached before him, spoke the general impression of the International Ballroom of the Washington-Hilton: "We dare to believe we are ushering in a new age."

Wright could have meant for the country and the world, but it is manifestly true for old-time religion. Carter was entirely at home at the prayer breakfast. He might have been back in his own Baptist church in Plains. He said he is going to try Christianity as national policy. Even skeptics were glad to hear it.

washington winds

ralph

