

F. Y. I.

Today's release is the last of a two-part series on the public's appraisal of the Presidential press conference.

PUBLIC OPINION NEWS SERVICE

For Release  NOT EARLIER THAN: WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 1962

The Public Appraises The Presidential Press Conference

No. 2 — The Job Done by the Press

Public Rates Job Press Does In Handling JFK Conferences

Americans Cite Questions THEY Would Ask; Reporters Given a 'Passing' Grade on Their Queries

By GEORGE GALLUP
Director, American Institute of Public Opinion

PRINCETON, N. J., May 8—The White House Press Corps does not get the plaudits from the American public that President Kennedy does for THEIR role in the Presidential press conference.

To see how the nationwide "audience" at these sessions evaluate the give-and-take between the President and the press, the Gallup Poll sought the public's reactions to both Kennedy's performance and the questions he is asked by news reporters.

In addition, Americans were given the opportunity to state the questions that they themselves would ask the President if they could sit in at one of his press conferences.

As reported earlier, nine out of ten persons who have seen the President in action at a press conference recently have formed a favorable impression of the way he handles the questions posed to him by reporters.

To get the other side of the picture, all of those who had seen or heard a conference in the last six months (an estimated 78 million adults) were asked:

"How good are the questions asked by the reporters at these press conferences?"

Summarizing the answers, the public's "ratings" break down as follows:

Thirty-six per cent of those in the audience would give the press a high mark on their questions — they rate the queries as "excellent," "informative," "very interesting," and "very much to the point."

Forty-eight per cent give the reporters what amounts to a "passing" grade — they describe the questions as "just fair," "average," "not bad," or in the "some are good, some are bad" category.

Only nine per cent are completely critical of the press conference questions.

Many of the objections are based on the view that the questions are repetitious and waste time by returning to a topic already covered.

Also heard frequently was the criticism that some questions are "silly," "foolish," "ridiculous," and "superficial."

Others criticize reporters for trying to "trap" or "embarrass" the President.

What Average Citizen Would Ask of President

An interesting fact comes to light in an analysis of the criticism made by the public and the character of the questions that they themselves would ask.

The public would be seeking enlightenment and information on basic issues. The press, on the other hand, obviously is looking for news on more specific and topical developments which will provide material for tomorrow's newspapers.

The queries submitted by the public cover a wide range of topics. But they boil down to two basic categories — international problems and domestic issues — and within each of these categories, the leading questions would be:

Mr. President . . .

International:

"What new steps or new approaches do you have in mind that could be taken to ease world tensions and lead toward peace?"

"What could the U.S. government do now and in the near future about getting Castro and Communism out of Cuba and restoring democracy to that nation?"

"What are the real chances that Russia will agree to a nuclear test ban so that the U.S. can discontinue testing?"

Domestic:

"What specifically can the government do to help lighten the burden of today's high cost of living? In particular, what are the chances of a tax cut in the near future?"

"Could you spell out in detail just how the American people benefit from the increased government spending both at home and abroad?"

"What moves can you take to open up jobs for people who are now unemployed?"

A number of the questions raised by the public have to do with "special interest" categories. Farmers, for example, would like to know if Kennedy has a solution to the farm problem.

Many Negroes would like to get the President's ideas and plans for speeding up racial integration. From Southern whites, on the other hand, come queries about why the states cannot be left alone to solve their racial problems.