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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH JACK HUSHEN

AT 11:50 A.M. EDT

MARCH 12, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. HUSHEN: The reason Ron is not out here is that he is in the Cabinet meeting, which is expected to last 90 minutes to maybe even two hours. At the conclusion of that, he will come out and either post or brief. So, we will probably not be giving a lunch lid until the conclusion of that.

I saw by the agenda that there were quite a few items that they plan to take up today.

Q That will be about what time, then?

MR. HUSHEN: I would guess somewhere around 1 o'clock.

Q Can you tell us what was on the agenda?

MR. HUSHEN: I will get to that in a minute.

Before we move into the announcements, let me, on behalf of the Press Office and on behalf of the President, congratulate Helen Thomas on becoming president of the White House Press Corps Association.

The President came to work this morning in the Oval Office at 7:40 and met with Messrs. Scowcroft, Hartmann, Rumsfeld, Friedersdorf and Hushen.

At 10:15 this morning, he met with 53 young people who were the winners of the Voice of Democracy national broadcast script writing contest. There are more than one-half million participants from across the country in this annual Voice of Democracy scholarship program, which is sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Ladies' Auxiliary.

Each student prepared a 3- to 5-minute broadcast script on the theme "My Responsibility as a Citizen."

At 11:00, as you know, the President chaired the Cabinet meeting. This is the first meeting since February 21. Among the items on the agenda are the following:

There will be a discussion of the Clemency Board's activities and the President will be asking the various representatives and agencies for some personnel to augment the Clemency Board to handle the large numbers of applications that have come in over the past several months in order for the Board to meet its deadline.

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Secretary Butz will review the agricultural production situation and give some estimates on what the remainder of the year has to offer.

Bill Seidman will give an update on the economic situation.

Frank Zarb will review the current status of the energy plans.

Secretary Schlesinger will review the current military situation in Indochina.

Bob Ingersoll, the Deputy Secretary of State, will give the rundown on the diplomatic scene.

This is Secretary Brennan's last Cabinet meeting. He is expected to have some farewell remarks. This will be the first Cabinet meeting for Secretary Coleman and Secretary Hills.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon, the President will meet with the members of the United States Commission on Civil Rights and its chairman, Arthur Flemming. Chairman Flemming will give an appraisal of the laws and policies of the Federal Government with respect to the denials of equal protection under the laws of the Constitution. They will then discuss some of the problems of civil rights that are of particular concern to the Commission and the President.

This meeting was held at the request of Mr. Flemming.

Q Is there any chance of our getting Flemming afterwards?

MR. HUSHEN: I think you probably could catch him outside the West Lobby if you were to be inclined.

Q He won't like it in the rain.

MR. HUSHEN: We will see if we can make some better arrangements.

Q Jack, was there anybody from the Treasury Department in the Cabinet meeting?

MR. HUSHEN: I am sure there was. Under Secretary Steve Gardner was there.

Q Where is Secretary Simon?

MR. HUSHEN: He is, I believe, in Canada. I think he had a speech in Canada. He was up in Philadelphia yesterday.

Back to the Flemming meeting. We have posted the photo pool for covering the start of that meeting.

Let me give you some information now on the South Bend trip.

On Monday, March 17th, the President will be making a trip to the University of Notre Dame at South Bend where he will receive an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the university. Father Theodore Hesburg, President of Notre Dame, invited the President to receive the degree at the university convocation at 11 o'clock Eastern Standard Time. That will take place in the South Arena of the university's Athletic and Convention Center.

Q Do you mean EDT?

MR. HUSHEN: Eastern Standard Time, 11:00 Standard Time.

Q No, not in Indiana.

MR. HUSHEN: All times in South Bend are given in the local time, which is Eastern Standard Time, one hour behind Washington time. They did not go on Daylight Saving Time.

The President is expected to address the audience, which will consist of university students, faculty, trustees and members of the public following the presentation of the degree. Let me give you some details on departures.

Q Subject to the speech, can you tell us anything about a major speech? Is it on economics or foreign policy?

MR. HUSHEN: I cannot. I would classify it as a major speech.

Q You would?

MR. HUSHEN: I think so.

Q On what topic?

MR. HUSHEN: I can't give you that.

Q Foreign or domestic?

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Usually, when the White House has -- not usually, but it has many times happened that the White House will at least go so far as to say a major speech on foreign policy or a major speech on domestic policy.

MR. HUSHEN: I think you will get your guidance on that before we depart.

Q Are you requesting free T.V. time for that?

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q But it is still a major speech?

MR. HUSHEN: I will just leave it where it is.

Q Why? Is it a secret what the topic is?

MR. HUSHEN: I have not seen it.

Q What are you taking back?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not taking anything back.

Q Can't you at least give us the area?

MR. HUSHEN: I cannot.

Q Who said it was a major speech, Jack?

MR. HUSHEN: I did.

Q How do you know, since you have not seen it?

MR. HUSHEN: Well, Les --

Q Jack, you have not seen the speech. You say it is a major speech. Who said it was a major speech? Who that has seen it has said that it is a major speech?

MR. HUSHEN: The President is looking forward to going to the University of Notre Dame. He expects to be making remarks there that we would categorize as being significant.

Q Is that a step down from major? (Laughter)

MR. HUSHEN: We expect to leave for South Bend about 9:30 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time.

Q Is that the press plane or the White House?

MR. HUSHEN: That is the President.

Q Is that leaving the White House or Andrews?

MR. HUSHEN: That would be leaving Andrews, and arriving at South Bend shortly after 10 a.m., Eastern Standard Time.

The press plane is expected to depart about 8:30 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, which is Washington time, and arriving in South Bend shortly after 9:00 a.m., Eastern Standard Time.

At approximately 11:45, at the conclusion of the convocation, the President expects to attend an informal reception for the Notre Dame University Academic Council, which an advisory body made up of 17 students and 32 faculty members.

Q Jack, that is St. Patrick's Day.

MR. HUSHEN: This is the date suggested by the University.

Q Seriously, Jack, it is St. Patrick's Day.

MR. HUSHEN: I am aware of that.

Q This came out of Kinsolving's brief case.
(Laughter)

MR. HUSHEN: Let the record show that the laughter is due to the audience and not the briefer.

At any rate, this was a date mutually agreed upon, and it is St. Patrick's Day.

Q But it is no special event at the University?

MR. HUSHEN: No. Father Hesburg says that he will be interested in having the President come and address the student body and receive an honorary degree.

Q What happens after the reception?

MR. HUSHEN: Following the reception, the President will have one of his luncheons with the news media executives, and these will be representatives from Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky and Wisconsin.

That will take place in the Athletic and Convention Center, which is the same place we have the addresses being given.

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Q What time on that?

MR. HUSHEN: It will be a luncheon. We are planning right now on approximately 12:15.

At approximately 2:30 the President is expected to meet with a group of Indiana College Presidents and their wives, who are being invited to a separate luncheon with Father Hesburg, which the President will go to at the conclusion of the news media executives luncheon.

At approximately 6 o'clock Eastern Standard Time, there will be a regional press conference at the Campus Center for Continuing Education, and we will follow our usual format of dividing the questions between the White House Press Corps and the local news media.

Q Should that be 7 o'clock our time? The press conference?

MR. HUSHEN: That is right.

Those of you who are planning to go on the trip who wish to ask a question, put an "X" next to your name on the sign-up sheet. We will put the names in a hat and draw them in whatever order and post the order in which they come out.

Q Jack, is anybody else going along from the Administration to brief these news executives, or is it going to be one of these White House Administration shows similar to the one in Florida.

MR. HUSHEN: I would expect that there would be additional members of the White House staff, but I do not have a list.

Q These regional news executives, are they simply coming to hear the President or are they going to hear somebody else from the Administration?

MR. HUSHEN: Let me go on and finish this, and then I will get back to your question.

At the conclusion of the press conference, the President will have a working dinner with the Governors from the Midwestern area, and those that are invited are from Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland.

Q Those are Midwestern Governors?

MR. HUSHEN: With the exception of Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland.

Q Are these people he has not met with before on the earlier trips?

MR. HUSHEN: That is correct. These Governors are the only ones East of the Rocky Mountains with whom the President has not had a chance to meet with in discussing energy.

Q Is Governor Mandel going out on Air Force One or making his own plans?

MR. HUSHEN: As a matter of fact, Governor Mandel has not, as far as we know, yet accepted. So, we don't know what sort of transportation he will have.

Q What is the President going to do between the meeting with the college presidents and the press conference?

MR. HUSHEN: I think he will be engaged in staff work.

Q What time do you expect him to leave for Washington?

MR. HUSHEN: The President is expected to depart at 10 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, which would be 11 o'clock Washington time, arriving back in Washington at 12:30 a.m., approximately.

Q EDT?

MR. HUSHEN: EDT.

Of course, as in the past, we have had a briefing by Ron and by some of the Governors at the conclusion of that dinner. So, the press plane would be returning somewhat later than that.

Q Why don't we spend the night? We will, anyway.

MR. HUSHEN: I have just been handed a note that the news executives have been invited to stay for a briefing at the conclusion of the luncheon, and we do not have a list of those who will be going with the President yet. In fact, the news executives have also been invited to stay for the press conference.

Q The news executives affair will be closed?

MR. HUSHEN: Yes.

Q Is there a pool?

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Where is the President going to stay on campus during this time that he has some free time?

MR. HUSHEN: We will check that.

Q Where is the press going to stay?

MR. HUSHEN: We will have all that information for you hopefully by Friday on the specifics of that, but I wanted you to know what the main outline of the day looked like.

Q Would you expect the text of this major address to be out very early?

MR. HUSHEN: We always try, Frank.

We have two personnel announcements today.

I think you already have the paper on the fact that the President is today announcing his intention to nominate Harold Tyler of Bedford, New York, to be Deputy Attorney General of the United States. He will succeed Laurence H. Silberman, who is resigning.

The release on the announcement and the exchange of letters between Mr. Silberman and the President will be available shortly at the conclusion of the briefing.

Judge Tyler has served since 1962 as the United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York. He was in private law practice in New York City for approximately ten years before his appointment as an Assistant Attorney General of the United States in 1960.

Q Jack, I thought that Silberman was going to have another job. Has that idea been dropped?

MR. HUSHEN: Not at all. The President still is hopeful of retaining his very valued services, but we have nothing to announce in terms of anything on that.

Q Jack, this seems a good time to bring it up. What about the jobs that Sawhill and Gibson were going to be offered after this other thing fell through?

MR. HUSHEN: I will have to check on that and see how that stands. We should stand with our original statement on that, that we are looking for other positions for them.

Q Is he a Republican -- Judge Tyler?

MR. HUSHEN: I would say yes to that.

Q Obviously appointed to the court by President Kennedy, was he not?

MR. HUSHEN: Yes.

Q What is the salary on that, Jack?

MR. HUSHEN: The salary of the Deputy Attorney General is \$42,500 per annum.

Q That is more than a District Judge gets?

MR. HUSHEN: \$42,500 is the pay for the Deputy Attorney General, and \$40,000 is the pay for a District Judge.

Q Jack, when is the resignation of Silberman effective?

MR. HUSHEN: It will be effective upon the appointment.

Q Does that require Senate confirmation?

MR. HUSHEN: It certainly does.

Q Do you mean it is effective upon confirmation?

MR. HUSHEN: It is effective upon the appointment and qualification of your successor, which I would take to mean confirmation.

Q Jack, the President's letter does not say anything about a future appointment for Silberman.

MR. HUSHEN: No, but I am saying it.

The President accepted Mr. Silberman's resignation with deep regret, and to repeat what I said earlier, is hopeful of retaining his very valuable services in the Administration.

Q Are you through with the announcements? I have a question.

MR. HUSHEN: No, we have two personnel actions. The other was the resignation.

Let me answer a question we had earlier about the President's location. He will be on campus all during that day, Fran. We do not have a precise location to announce.

Those are all the announcements I have today.

Q Jack, the House Judiciary Committee has approved a bill to limit the Secret Service to guarding one Presidential house. Does the President approve or disapprove of this bill. If so, why and on what grounds?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't think that is a matter for us to reach a decision on at this point.

Q Is he going to support the bill or not?

MR. HUSHEN: It has a long way to go before it gets here.

Q In other words, the President does not know about this bill or has no opinion on it or what? Does the President believe that Secret Service should be assigned to cover two and three Presidential homes or not, Jack?

MR. HUSHEN: The President believes that the Congress will work its will, and when the legislation gets to his desk he will take a look at it.

Q Jack, does the President have any thoughts on Senator Jackson's suggestion today that Mike Mansfield might go to Cambodia and somehow negotiate some sort of settlement or try to --

Q The suggestion was that he go to China and see Sihanouk.

Q China or someplace. Whatever it was you said. (Laughter)

MR. HUSHEN: If only we could be so imprecise.

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Q Is that the way it comes out on the tube at night?

MR. HUSHEN: The matter of the resolution of the Cambodian situation is not one of a lack of channels of communication. As the State Department made very clear, we have been actually pursuing a negotiated resolution to that matter. But the facts are that the other side has no interest in negotiating.

Q Who have we been pursuing it with?

MR. HUSHEN: I think that was pretty well spelled out by Philip Habib at the State Department.

Q If I may ask a question related to Bob's --

Q In other words, he, the President, does not think much of the idea of Mansfield going to China and talking to Sihanouk?

MR. HUSHEN: It is not a question of that, Helen.

Q Well, what is it? That is what you are saying.

MR. HUSHEN: I mean, as far as Senator Mansfield, the President has known the Senator for a long time and is very respectful of the Senator's views on any matter that is of importance to this country. But the question is not one of a lack of a channel of communication.

Q Why not try it anyway? I mean, what have you got to lose at this stage?

Q Jack, that suggests that we have been in touch with Sihanouk, or some other man. Can you comment on that?

MR. HUSHEN: No. You would have to address the specifics on that to the State Department, which has addressed this problem.

Q This suggestion was specific as to Mansfield going to see Sihanouk and the thought that he would have some influence on the situation.

MR. HUSHEN: Other than general news stories, apparently out of a press breakfast this morning, I have not discussed it with the President.

Q Can you say whether or not the President has discussed the possibility of Mansfield going to China or Cambodia as a possible intermediary?

MR. HUSHEN: With the Senator?

Q The possibility of Mansfield going.

MR. HUSHEN: No, I don't think that is something that has been discussed.

Q We already have Albert and Rhodes going shortly to China. This raises the possibility of whether Mansfield would be invited.

MR. HUSHEN: Senator Mansfield was in China very recently, was he not? I know of no particular contact that was established during that trip.

Q Jack, you say that there is no lack of channels of communication, but there is lack of interest in negotiations. You said, "but the facts are the other side has no interest in negotiations."

MR. HUSHEN: That is correct.

Q I think what Senator Mansfield is suggesting is that he go to China and evoke some interest -- I mean, Jackson suggested that Senator Mansfield go to China and evoke some interest in negotiations. That is the question. What does the President think about that?

MR. HUSHEN: As far as I know, the President has not focused on that question. The parties on the other side are aware of our interest in this matter. Just to repeat what I said, we are certainly interested in resolving this problem, but until the other side is willing to, or agreeable to, seeking something at a negotiating table rather than on the battlefield, then the contact is limited.

Q Jack, where is all this business about this hope of getting negotiations started if we can just get through the rainy season, if the feeling of the government is that the other side has no intent and no interest in negotiating? That seems to be contradictory.

MR. HUSHEN: Not at all.

Q Jack, yesterday I asked the question, who are you going to negotiate with? Three times I asked that question, because in the briefing, on page four of the transcript, Ron said, "If they get through the dry season to the wet season, at least there is the hope of a negotiated settlement."

I asked three times, with whom are you going to negotiate, and three times I was referred to the State Department. The answer from the State Department was, "If you can tell us who is shooting the rockets, we will tell you who we are going to negotiate with." That is a direct quote.

MR. HUSHEN: It is not a laughing matter.

Q Let me go further on this because I have got more.

MR. HUSHEN: As to who we have negotiated with, you will have to address that to the State Department. I think the question of who we would be negotiating with is --

Q But you have hinged your whole negotiated settlement on this. The facts of the case are, that why don't you try to send Mansfield because Sihanouk refused to see you in February, he started to see you in December of 1974 and January of 1975, and both times, Sihanouk refused to see you.

The facts of the case are that we have been told that perhaps there is going to be a negotiated settlement. I find it a little inconsistent to base a request for emergency aid on the tantalizing tid-bit of possible negotiations when, in fact, nobody wants to negotiate with you because you have tried through Peking and you have tried through third party countries over there, and nobody will talk to you. So, why not try Mansfield?

Could you answer my question?

MR. HUSHEN: Let me just try to address myself to Walt's question, because I think you are looking for an answer here that I am not in a position to give.

First of all, there is some question here as to what has been proposed. Different reporters have different ideas. I am not ruling anything out, and I don't want to say that this is a viable alternative.

It is something that, as far as I know, is not under consideration at the White House. As I said before, the channel -- whoever it may be or whatever it happens to be -- is not something that is clogged on our side.

Q Jack, for the record, Philip Habib, the other day, refused to name the parties that they may have been in touch with, so your recommendation to go to the State Department didn't work.

MR. HUSHEN: You don't expect me to go beyond that, then?

Q I just want to know, is there a hope for negotiations or is there, as you said today, the other side has no interest? Yesterday, we were told there is a hope for negotiations if we can get through the rainy season. Today, you are saying the other side has no interest in negotiating. Have we changed? Is there a new view?

MR. HUSHEN: What you are trying to do is make today and tomorrow the same day, and that is not true. Today, we are in the dry season there. The fighting is going on. If Cambodia needs the aid to get them through the dry season into the rainy season, there is a possibility of a negotiated settlement, but that is only if the other side is willing to sit down and negotiate, Bob.

Q If the other side is not willing to sit down and negotiate, then there is no hope for negotiations. Isn't that what you said?

MR. HUSHEN: We have never said anything other than that.

Q Oh, yes you did. You said something yesterday. Yes.

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Yes, sir.

MR. HUSHEN: Let me check the record.

Q Not you, but Mr. Nessen said that cables, unidentified, suggests the Khmer Rouge may have problems of manpower and supply. Therefore, there is hope for negotiation. That is exactly, I am almost sure, almost to the word, what Ron Nessen told us. Cables suggest manpower and supply problems. What cables, and how much, and so forth? Or is this just a --

Q Jack, I understood Ron to say there was a hope for negotiated settlement yesterday, which is a little bit different from a hope for negotiations. You seem to imply -- in what you say today -- that there are no negotiations going on now. Is this indeed the case?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't feel I can really answer that question.

Q You say that the fact is that the other side has no interest in negotiations, which seems to say there are no negotiations going on now.

MR. HUSHEN: I would certainly draw that conclusion on the basis of what I said.

Q Jack, it seems to me -- at least you have given me the impression -- in this whole series of questions and answers, that you think that Prince Sihanouk is a viable channel of negotiation with the Khmer Rouge, which happens to be a very, very important point. Is that the impression that you intend to leave?

MR. HUSHEN: Would you try that question again? I was reading a note.

Q In the course of this discussion about whether Mansfield ought to be a viable channel, you seem to leave the impression -- at least with me-- that Prince Sihanouk is the channel of negotiation through which we have a contact with the Khmer Rouge, or could have, that Prince Sihanouk is in fact the leader of the Khmer Rouge, which is a very, very disputed point.

If that is the impression that you intend to leave, I think it is worth noting.

MR. HUSHEN: I certainly didn't mean to leave that impression. I don't think I said anything that would have lead you to believe that, that Prince Sihanouk was the leader of the insurgents.

Q Can you give us the name of any single individual with whom the United States has been in contact with on the other side?

MR. HUSHEN: I cannot.

Q Can the State Department?

MR. HUSHEN: I am sure they can, if they would care to.

Q Is there anyone you would like to negotiate with?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not in a position to respoid to that kind of question.

Q Is the State Department?

MR. HUSHEN: I think you ought to ask them.

Q Apparently Walter did, to find out who is firing the rockets.

MR. HUSHEN: I am just not in a position to lay before you who we have had discussions with in the past.

Q The State Department can't answer it either, Jack.

Q Jack, who briefed you before you came out to brief us? Did the State Department brief you on what you are telling us now?

MR. HUSHEN: We try to talk to as many people as we think is necessary in order to respond accurately and adequately to your questions.

Q Jack, are you saying it is in the best interest of the United States to conduct secret negotiations at this time and they not be made public?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not saying that.

Q Why can't you confirm that the United States government has been in contact with Sihanouk in Peking? The State Department puts it out as public information.

MR. HUSHEN: All right. That is fine for the State Department.

Q Jack, my impression of what you are saying here today is a real negative reaction to what Jackson is proposing. You said the President was not considering it. Is he willing to consider it? Will he consider it?

MR. HUSHEN: You are asking me to say something that I don't know the answer to, Gaylord. And maybe there is some difficulty in understanding it, but I am not trying to rule that out. What I am saying is the channel, the conduit, whatever you want to call it, is not the problem from our side.

As long as the insurgents, the Khmer Rouge, are winning on the battlefield, they are not going to sit down and negotiate. We have said that consistently.

Q Jack, has anyone, besides Jackson, proposed the Mansfield route, that you are employing Mansfield as a possible contact? Has this come up before inside the White House?

MR. HUSHEN: Not as far as I have heard.

Q Have you seen many cables today as to what the situation is?

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Jack, in the communique between the President and the Secretary of State these last few days, has the matter of Cambodia come up on one side or the other?

MR. HUSHEN: I do not know all the conversations that have transpired between the President and the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State's primary interest, as you well know, is in the Middle East and Cyprus right now.

Q Yes, but as Secretary of State, he has many interests.

MR. HUSHEN: I understand that.

Q That is why I am asking whether this side or the other side of communications, whether Cambodia specifically, in one form or another, has been mentioned?

MR. HUSHEN: Without being privy to the conversations, I just can't answer the question.

Q Jack, can you tell us who briefed you on Cambodia this morning? I hope that question is in order and that we get some answer to it.

MR. HUSHEN: Without specifically saying who I talked to before coming out here, I have talked to several people who are certainly in a position to know what the various situations are.

Q None of them knew anything about these cables that Ron mentioned yesterday that indicated the Khmer Rouge may have supply and personnel problems? None of them ever mentioned that?

MR. HUSHEN: The cable Ron mentioned yesterday was the same cable that Senator Humphrey was shown by State Department personnel. This cable indicates that while the Cambodians may be suffering defeats on the battlefield, the other side is obviously taking casualties, also. That is all Ron sought to convey yesterday when he said that they are having their problems, too.

Q Jack, do you have a reaction to the House Democratic caucus vote this morning, which was, as I recall, 188 to 50 against providing any aid to either South Vietnam or Cambodia?

MR. HUSHEN: What you have just told me is news to me. I think the President is hopeful that the Congress will enact the necessary appropriation. He was pleased yesterday to see that the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee is moving. The important thing is to realize the necessity for this aid to get through quickly so that it can be made available to the Cambodians.

Q Jack, you said the President is pleased at the movement in the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee. Is he going to push for additional aid from that subcommittee or is he satisfied with what he has got?

MR. HUSHEN: I can barely hear you.

Q Is he satisfied with the level of funding out of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee? I know what was asked for by the Administration, but are you going to go back and ask for additional aid or are you satisfied with \$125 million?

MR. HUSHEN: The focus, I think, is on the movement, the fact that this is now moving through Congress.

The President's request for \$222 million was the figure that he felt was needed. Time is critical, and we will just let it stand there.

Q If you can get \$125 million all the way through, will you be satisfied with that?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not in a position to say that, Dick.

Q Did you talk to the President about the suggestion that Senator Mansfield go to China and see Sihanouk?

MR. HUSHEN: No, I said earlier I did not.

Q You did not?

Q Has that not been raised directly by anyone with the President this morning?

MR. HUSHEN: As far as I know, it has not been.

Q Was your original answer to that question based on the conversation you had specifically dealing with the Mansfield proposal? In other words, you had a rather set little statement at the start in response to that. Is that the product of some contact made on the White House level? You didn't talk to the President. Did you just pop that out on the spur or did you talk to somebody to get it? What is the policy that we are to use?

MR. HUSHEN: What we say from this podium reflects the views of the White House and the Administration. We don't just make things up out of whole cloth, Steve.

Q As a rational question, Jack, trying to introduce a little civility here, if you failed at all other efforts to get the other side to come to a negotiating table, why not try the Mansfield proposal?

MR. HUSHEN: You are trying to get me to rule -- in fact, I take, by your question, that I have ruled it out, and I have not.

Q You have said that it is not under consideration.

MR. HUSHEN: Well, it came up as far as --

Q You said, "nothing has been ruled out, but it is not under consideration by the White House staff." So, I say, why not?

MR. HUSHEN: It came up only 30 minutes ago.

Q About 8:40 this morning.

MR. HUSHEN: You want to have something answered before we have even had a chance to consider it.

Q Jack, does the White House welcome this type of approach and suggestion by leaders of the opposition party in the Congress, or does the White House and the Administration consider they are stepping a little beyond their bounds in foreign policy?

MR. HUSHEN: I think the White House is always interested in what Congress has to say.

Q Jack, does the President feel that the recent events in Portugal pose any danger or trouble for the United States defensive alliances or with NATO?

MR. HUSHEN: I would rather have you go to the State Department and get that answer.

Q Jack, is the President aware that those of us who have covered both the State Department and this -- I am sorry. Are you answering a question, Jack?

MR. HUSHEN: Was there another question? I am sorry.

Q Jack, do you have any answer on Portugal?

MR. HUSHEN: I referred him to the State Department for his answer.

Q You said that Cambodia was obviously not the first priority with Dr. Kissinger. Is it the first priority with the President in terms of foreign affairs?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't want to make a pecking order for the President on what is number one and number two, or number three or number four, for that matter.

Q Jack, is there anything to these allegations that the CIA was involved in the attempted coup in Portugal?

MR. HUSHEN: I think the State Department responded to that yesterday. I have been assured that that is the fact, that the United States did not have any involvement in that.

Q While we are on the subject of Portugal, Jack, perhaps you can respond to this somewhat more specific question the situation. The Portuguese government is suggesting very strongly that the U.S. Ambassador in Lisbon leave for his own safety. Is he going to leave?

MR. HUSHEN: I think that Ambassador Carlucci is confident that the Portuguese government can maintain the security necessary to see to it that his life is not endangered.

Q The Portuguese government does not seem to be that confident, or at least, they seem unhappy about something.

MR. HUSHEN: He is confident that they can, and we are confident that he is confident.

Q Of course, Jack, there is the question of where he is going to stay.

MR. HUSHEN: We have no plans to return him.

Q Jack, an in-house question, if I may. Has the President, himself, ever gone over the transcripts of these briefings and the State Department, to compare, because it is my impression -- and may be shared by others -- that we get far more information from this podium than you ever get from the State Department. Is this what the President wants?

MR. HUSHEN: Let's hear it for Les. (Laughter)

Q No, I mean seriously, you cannot fall off the floor, Jack, but seriously, for Walt to be given an answer like "check and find out who is firing the rockets" Is something on the order of outrageous.

MR. HUSHEN: I am anxious to see what his answer is, myself.

Q I just wondered, does the President know about how this -- you send us to the State Department. That is an exercise in futility.

MR. HUSHEN: To answer your question, the President does read the briefing transcripts.

Q Jack, getting back to Dick Growald's question; the question is, what the President's assessment of this is. It seems to me that the proper forum for getting the President's assessment is here rather than the State Department.

MR. HUSHEN: In answer to that question, I don't have anything I can give you.

Q Jack, I would like to ask something about strip mining. The Senate was moving toward passage of their strip mining bill this morning. I have not seen the wire. I don't know whether they have passed it, but they likely will today.

Evidently, they are ignoring, I think there were a total of 32, objections that the President listed to the bill they passed at the tail-end of the last session, which he pocket-vetoed.

Number one, can we assume that if the bill, which ultimately is passed, is identical or similar to the one last session that the President will again veto it?

Secondly, has there been any nose-counting yesterday on whether he could sustain that veto?

MR. HUSHEN: You are considerably further down the road than we are on that in terms of even questioning whether we have a nose-count on sustaining a veto on a bill that has not even gone to committee.

Q Then, back to the first part, Jack.

MR. HUSHEN: The fact is, Congress knows what we think should be in the strip mining bill, but to find out what its impact is and as far as what we will do about it, there is nothing I can give you at this time.

Q You mean even though, evidently, they are ignoring all of the President's proposals for changing that bill -- and they are going to pass the same one as they did last year -- you are not prepared to say now that he will veto it again?

MR. HUSHEN: It is too early to reach the final judgment. I understand that there have only been a couple of changes made in it, but the bill is not here yet. I have seen many changes made in legislation in conference.

THE PRESS: Thank you, John.

END

(AT 12:40 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 1:10 P.M. EDT

MARCH 12, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You saw the participants at the Cabinet meeting, and you have a general idea of the time.

The President opened the Cabinet meeting by giving a brief report on the Clemency Board extension. He said that in mid-January the Clemency Board had received only 860 applications. At the present time, it had 11,000 applications, and when the Board ends at the end of this month, it will have received a total of 16,000 to 17,000 applications.

He said it was a good commission and has done a good job. He said the commission has a big responsibility to finish processing these applications. They don't have a very big staff over there, so he said that he might have to ask the government departments to lend a hand with lawyers and other help while they clear up these 16,000 or 17,000 applications.

Q Do you have the figures on the number eligible?

MR. NESSEN: I don't. The Clemency Board could give it to you.

Q Ron, were these actual applications or are these inquiries?

MR. NESSEN: No, these were applications.

Q As a result of this number, Ron, is there any second thought about extending it another month?

MR. NESSEN: No, he made clear this was the final month.

The next item was Earl Butz reporting on farm prices. He said that in 1974 food prices increased 14 percent.

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Q Is that retail food prices?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, retail food prices went up 14 percent in 1974. Eighty percent of that increase was added to the price of food after the food left the farm. That was wages, transportation, fuel, packaging and so forth.

He said the increase has slowed down markedly but has not stopped. The anticipated increase in the price of food in the first three months of 1975 is expected to be 1-1/2 to 2 percent.

In the second quarter, the second three months of 1975, it is expected to go up another 1-1/2 to 2 percent.

In the second half of 1975, food prices are expected to level off or decline slightly.

He then pointed out that food costs represent less than 17 percent of the take-home pay of the average family. This is a fraction of a percent higher than last year, a tenth of a percent higher than last year.

He said this is near the lowest level that food prices have ever been as a proportion of the family's budget and should be going lower. The 17 percent of take-home pay figure for food includes meals eaten out at restaurants.

He said that one of the products that will be most readily available this year will be beef. In 1974 each person ate an average of 117 pounds of beef. That is supposed to go up by seven pounds per person in 1975, up to 124 pounds per person.

He said beef will be a relatively good buy, relatively cheap, in 1975.

On the other hand, poultry and pork, consumption is expected to decline somewhat this year because of the prices. He said the best buys in food, in addition to beef, in 1975, because of the cheaper prices, are expected to be fruit, vegetables, potatoes, rice and peanuts. He said, "We are up to our ears in peanuts."

Q Is that a quote.

MR. NESSEN: That is a quote. Do you think I made that up?

Q Is he going to ask for a conservation program on peanuts?

MR. NESSEN: There is legislation up there, as you know, Peter, to get rid of marketing orders on peanuts. Is that what you call it?

Q To get rid of what, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: To get rid of some government programs which are contributing to this oversupply of peanuts.

Q Do you mean price support on peanuts?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not a price support. It is a marketing order system.

Q Ron, did he give any explanation of why the price is still going up slightly on beef or on food in general at a time when the farmers' prices have plunged perceptibly?

MR. NESSEN: He called that to their attention, the fact that the prices that farmers get is down 15 percent, and that is mostly a decline in cattle prices.

Q Fifteen percent from when?

MR. NESSEN: Mid-January over a year earlier. The farm cost -- that is what the farmer pays for whatever he buys -- is up 12 percent between mid-January of 1975 and mid-January of 1974.

He didn't go into the particular price of beef, although he said more of it would be available and it would be a relatively good buy and relatively cheap. He did not connect up what the price of beef was in relation to declining farm prices.

Q Was there any discussion or concern over the fact that the middleman's price is obviously continuing to go up at a perceptible level while the farmers' are going down, which is what the farmers said would happen last year if they followed the Administration's advice to raise more beef?

MR. NESSEN: He referred to that by saying that 80 percent of the increase in the price of food in 1974 occurred after the food left the farm. He didn't go beyond that.

Q Was there any concern expressed about that action, that it maybe should be taken by the Administration to try and balance it out?

MR. NESSEN: He did not go beyond what I mentioned.

Q Did he say anything about the plight of the farmer because that is a pretty bleak picture when his farm prices are down 15 percent and his costs are up 20 percent. Did he say anything that the farmers' plight is bleak or that it is going to hurt you in the farm belt next year?

MR. NESSEN: He did not, Walt.

Q Did he propose any action at all? Farm prices are going down; the prices we pay at the super-market are still going up.

MR. NESSEN: Going up slightly.

Q Yes, but they are certainly not going down 15 percent like they have at the farm level. Did he say what the Administration should do about this?

MR. NESSEN: Not at this meeting, he did not.

Q Was there any discussion? Did the President say we ought to do something about that?

MR. NESSEN: That matter did not come up, Gaylord.

Just to finish Secretary Butz's report, "We are up to our ears in peanuts" is where I left off. There will be a record wheat crop this year, two-thirds of which will be exported.

Q Did he give any numbers?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't give any numbers.

There will be a record corn crop this year, also, but no numbers.

Q Did they say where it is going, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Just out of curiosity, how can you say that with variables such as drought and frost?

MR. NESSEN: He said there are a few dry places, but generally it looks like the crops are in good shape.

Q Did he say how much corn would be exported?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did he mention soybeans?

MR. NESSEN: I was just about to get to that.

There will be an increase in the soybean crop, half of which will be exported.

Q Half the increase or half the crop?

MR. NESSEN: Half the crop.

He pointed out that between wheat and soybeans and other farm exports, that this is a major source of foreign exchange for the United States and it is a good thing to do. He said, and this is a quote, "I think the rapid escalation of food prices is behind us and with good weather, I am sure of it."

Q Is this Secretary Butz or the President?

MR. NESSEN: Butz.

Q Did he say how much of the corn crop would be exported?

MR. NESSEN: He did not.

Q Ron, in following up Walt Rodger's question, my recollection is that last year at this time they made a similar prediction. Then we had droughts in the spring, and that is what wrecked the corn crop and the wheat crop and everything else. How does he make these predictions now?

MR. NESSEN: He talked about the winter wheat crop being pretty well determined now, and that that is going to be a big one and that the outlook for the whether is a few dry spots, but generally good.

Q This is a weather forecast? In other words, we are not going to have the drought problem we had last year?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, he said there are a few dry spots, but otherwise the weather looks good.

Q When you are talking about the corn and soybeans, you are talking about the planting season?

MR. NESSEN: In terms of a record crop? He didn't give a very detailed rundown of what specifically he had in mind along that area. He just said there will be a record corn crop and a record wheat crop. He forecast a record wheat crop and a record corn crop.

Moving right along to Secretary Schlesinger, he gave a brief rundown on the situation in Cambodia. He used some maps to make his points. He said there were two problems in Cambodia at the moment.

This is a quote. "One, the immediately critical situation of needing ammunition and, two, keeping the airport open." He said by mid-April the Cambodians will run out of ammunition unless the American aid reaches them by then. He said, "Clearly they cannot survive without ammunition."

"With the funding" -- that is, the money the President has asked for -- "they have a reasonable chance."

Then he said, "One rule everyone should remember in Southeast Asia is never assume what the outcome will be."

Q Did he also say something about getting involved in a land war?

MR. NESSEN: Then he gave a brief --

Q Can you tell us anything about the context of that remark?

MR. NESSEN: It followed immediately upon his remark that with the funding they would have a reasonable chance, and based on what followed, I took him to mean that it would be very difficult to be very -- well, he used the word "assume." I think I will leave his remark right where it was: "Never assume what the outcome will be." I am not going to guess what he meant.

Q Is that a slight assertion that clearly they cannot survive without the ammunition?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you will let me go on and tell you a couple of other things that were said at the meeting, perhaps it will be clarified, Gaylord.

He gave a brief, factual account of where the lines are and so forth. Then he said, and this is a quote, "If morale holds and if the funding is given, we do not believe the city can be taken by storm," at which point Vice President Rockefeller said, "Well, what about what Director Colby said the other day?" at which point the President said that he had read the story on Colby's testimony. He said, and this is a quotation, "The headline did not coincide with his remarks."

The President said he had seen it in the paper and decided to check out what it was that Colby had said.

Q Who is talking now?

MR. NESSEN: The President.

The President said the headline in the story on Colby didn't coincide with what he had been hearing from Colby so he checked it out. He said that Colby did not say what the newspaper said he said.

Q What newspaper does he read?

MR. NESSEN: Quite a lot.

Q Was he referring to the Post story?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is what he was referring to.

Q Is this a reference to the reporter's assumptions or to what the people that heard Colby told the reporters?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he was criticizing any reporters, Steve.

Q No, I was not thinking of the reporters. I was thinking, was he criticizing the Congressmen who came out of there and gave the reporters the impression that went into the headline?

MR. NESSEN: He was not really criticizing anybody; he was just saying what Colby had said was not what the headlines indicated that he said.

Then he said that what Colby had said was what Colby had told him privately and what everybody was saying, which is, "Without money, they cannot hold."

Q This is what Colby said.

MR. NESSEN: This is the President.

"Without money they cannot hold; with money they have a reasonable chance to hold."

Then Secretary Schlesinger very briefly gave a very quick two or three sentence fill-in on the military situation in Vietnam.

Q What is the military situation?

MR. NESSEN: Basically what the newspapers are reporting. It was that kind of report.

Q Last night he told us he didn't consider it a major offensive. Did he tell the Cabinet it is not a major offensive?

MR. NESSEN: He did not mention the word offensive at all.

Q Ron, going back to Cambodia a minute, you quoted Schlesinger as saying that if morale holds and if the funds are given to them -- did he comment on the state of the morale in Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did he say how long they can hold, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He meant through the dry season.

Q Ron, on that Cambodia statement, you say that he suggested that they would have enough ammunition to last until mid-April. Now, I thought that the other day you said ten to 12 days, and then Schlesinger said two to three weeks yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Now, it seems to me that we are getting more and more optimistic reports on how long they can hold out. Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: No. I talked to Schlesinger about the two to three weeks versus the ten to 12 days. It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact hour when the situation is going to be beyond repair, and that is one of the things I think he meant when he said you cannot assume anything in Southeast Asia.

The fact is that that is calculated to be the date that they run out of ammunition -- mid-April. Whether they begin to conserve ammunition to the point where they cannot defend, it is just not a thing where you can say this hour that the thing is going to be over unless we get aid to them. But, there is no inclination to fudge or hedge on the dates.

Q Ron, does that comment by the Vice President indicate that he was not in on or kept abreast of the private information the President has been getting?

MR. NESSEN: I would not reach that conclusion.

Q Did they make any comment in this presentation about the vote by the Democratic caucus this morning?

MR. NESSEN: The President just factually said they had done this yesterday. Then he asked Max Friedersdorf at one point what the next steps and timetable would be, but there was no --

Q They voted this morning 180 something to --

MR. NESSEN: That wasn't reported in there then.

Q Not to give them the aid?

MR. NESSEN: No, that was not reported in there.

Q What was said about the Senate subcommittee decision?

MR. NESSEN Was that the 4-3 vote?

Q The 4-3 vote for \$125 million.

MR. NESSEN: Just the fact that they had done it. Then he asked Max, "What's next?" and Max listed the legislative timetable.

Q Getting back to that point of funding, was there any discussion about levels of funding that would be adequate, short of \$222 million?

MR. NESSEN: No, there were no dollars mentioned in there at all.

Q Back to the Rockefeller question. The Vice President said what about what Mr. Colby said the other day. Was he referring to something that Colby had told them, including Mr. Rockefeller, or --

MR. NESSEN: No, he was referring to the stories in the paper.

Q Of what Colby allegedly had said?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Did the subject of negotiations on Cambodia come up at all?

MR. NESSEN: It did towards the very end.

If I can just step back a moment, on the subject of who is saying what about the chances in Cambodia, I have noticed a couple of stories on the air and in the papers suggesting that there is a more optimistic view being taken publicly than is being taken privately.

I reviewed the things I have said, and I have talked to other people about it and looked at these cables from Phnom Penh and honestly, there is no difference between what is being said publicly and privately.

I know that Bob Schieffer raised the question yesterday of why was I going around saying that everybody that spoke on this subject was not correct. I certainly did not mean to give that impression, but I have looked very closely at this because I have my great concern for credibility.

After listening in here and talking to the President and talking to the NSC and others, I think precisely the same thing is being said publicly that is being reported to the President privately.

Negotiations. The President at the end said, "There is no lack of initiative on the negotiations." He said, "There have been six efforts while I have been President, and others before that." He said, "There can be no negotiations if the other side thinks it can win it all militarily rather than sharing."

I think he meant rather than negotiating something where they would share power.

Q From this, would we be incorrect in assuming that this is the proposal that the United States is making in the latest attempt to negotiate?

MR. NESSEN: I think you would be wrong to leap to any kind of conclusion like that.

Q What does "rather than sharing" mean, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish the whole quote.

"So, it is important to get the aid that would lead to a stabilized situation and hopefully a negotiated settlement." That is all that it was.

Q Ron, was the President aware at that time of Senator Jackson's proposal that Senator Mansfield go to China and attempt to work through Sihanouk to reach a negotiated settlement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he was aware of it at that time, Gaylord.

Q Is he aware of it now?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure.

Q So, you don't have his reaction?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, I noticed you closed the book. Are you going to talk about Zarb and Seidman, too?

MR. NESSEN: Neither one of them gave any report at the Cabinet meeting.

Q They didn't give any report?

Q Was there anything about South Vietnam, trouble in South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Only the very brief two or three sentence wrap-up on the military activities by Schlesinger.

Q Ron, on the negotiations of Cambodia, is the situation that there are channels but there is just not a willingness to negotiate on the other side? There is no lack of channels?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is a very fair statement, Dick.

Q Can you tell us who on the other side we have approached by name?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, and I think you ought to check with the State Department on that.

Q Ron, they advised us to check with the rockets.

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q At Hushen's briefing a reporter said he had called the State Department and when he asked them who we were supposed to negotiate with or who we were going to negotiate with, he said the State Department said, "Tell us who is firing the rockets and we will tell you who we are going to negotiate with."

This, of course, is the old battle door and shuttle cock game that goes on between the White House and the State Department. You are the battle door, we are the shuttle cock. You just keep batting us back and forth here.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't mean to bat you to and fro, but I don't know anything about any current negotiations.

Basically, what the Washington Post was saying yesterday was who do you negotiate with? Who is the leader of the insurgents? That is a difficult problem.

Senator Mansfield was in Peking a month or five or six weeks ago. I am told that Prince Sihanouk make no effort to make contact or talk to him about this at that time very recently.

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Q But the problem with this is that your deputy, Mr. Hushen, told us there is no lack of channels of communications.

MR. NESSEN: That is true.

Q And that involves that at least we know somebody to talk to to pass on these messages or to negotiate with or in one way or another to communicate with, and then you come out and say, "No, I don't know of any negotiations going on and I don't know who he would negotiate with." Now, which is it?

MR. NESSEN: Well, there is certainly no lack of channels and there has been no indication by the other side that there is any willingness to settle this by negotiation.

Jim, clearly, if the channels are going to be worthwhile and lead to anything in the way of a settlement, it is not something you can talk about at a press briefing.

Q Why is that?

Q All we are asking is the name of the leader of the other side, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I don't have the name of the leader on the other side.

Q Can you tell us who the last six initiatives were with?

MR. NESSEN: I thought Phil Habib gave a very long, detailed briefing the other day going back not only to the last six, but to a number of previous efforts to negotiate.

Q And did he refuse to name the parties that they may have been in contact with?

MR. NESSEN: I must say I think there is a problem if you are trying legitimately to negotiate a settlement to spread names and dates on the public record.

Q But you say you know of no negotiations. You said, "I don't know of any negotiations going on."

MR. NESSEN: That means I don't know of any. I personally don't know of any.

Q Oh, you don't mean that to say there aren't, you just don't know of any?

MR. NESSEN: Isn't that what I said?

Q You can read it one way and then read it the other way.

MR. NESSEN: I say I don't know of any.

Q Could you check?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think it is going to be possible to talk about negotiations if you have any hope of negotiations succeeding.

Q I am sorry, Ron.

Q Nobody is especially interested in what you know or do not know, Ron, in all seriousness. What we are interested in knowing is whether this government is aware of any such negotiations.

MR. NESSEN: I have suggested for a number of days that the State Department is the proper place to ask about negotiations.

Q And they won't tell us, Ron, anybody that they might have negotiated with in the past or are presently negotiating with, and they will not give us the names of any leaders of the other side.

MR. NESSEN: Then, I would have to conclude that they do that for a diplomatic reason, to preserve the possibility of a negotiated settlement, Bob.

Q Do you know that to be a fact, however, because privately, they inform us that they do not know who the leaders are on the other side.

MR. NESSEN: Then, if you know that answer, then why do you ask me?

Q Because you are the one that said there are channels open and if there are channels, that means there is someone on the other side you are talking to.

Q What is a channel, Ron? What do you mean when you say a channel? You mean there is an open line of communication to some person or some group?

Q Then, does it dead-end somewhere and run into a blank wall, or is there somebody on the other end? That is what we are trying to find out.

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think that it is possible to go very much beyond this on the negotiations without upsetting the prospect or possibility of a negotiated settlement.

Q What do you mean by channel?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is fairly clear, Ann.

Q No, it is not.

Q Do you mean channels on our side are open? Is that what you are talking about?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have a side, but the Cambodians are certainly open to a settlement.

Q I got the impression from an earlier briefing here today that there were no negotiations currently underway. Now, you seem to be saying that there may be some that you don't know about.

MR. NESSEN: I said I don't know of any negotiations.

Q Ron, we seem to be a little bogged down on this. We were told that Seidman gave an account of the economic situation and that Zarb went into the energy situation. Do you have anything on that for us?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know where you got that.

Q That was on the agenda.

MR. NESSEN: It was indeed on the agenda, but neither one of them made their presentations.

Q Ron, a few seconds ago you rhetorically asked in response to Jim's question, "Well, who are you going to negotiate with?" And that seemed to imply a certain degree of hopelessness in the situation. Perhaps that is the crux of it.

Who are you going to negotiate with? I understand that you have got closed channels on that problem, but if our hope for the aid is holding out the possibility that if we only give them the aid, perhaps they will be able to get into negotiations and yet, you stand up there and ask, "Who are we going to negotiate with?"

Does that not make it sort of look like you --

MR. NESSEN: Let me clarify this just a bit, if I can. Bob apparently got the same sort of rhetorical question from the State Department.

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When I say that channels are open, I think it is clear that from the record of the six attempts at a negotiated settlement under this President, and previous ones, and the fact that there have been these attempts before, and the fact that the Cambodian government has indicated its willingness to negotiate a settlement, the channels are open to sit down and negotiate a settlement.

I think it is clear from the record that Phil Habib laid out that nobody on the other side has moved along those channels to begin the process.

Does that clarify it any at all?

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Q Then we get to the question, well, what makes you think they will be any more anxious after the rainy season sets in?

MR. NESSEN: As the President said today, there is hope -- and I hope you notice that we use the word "hope" and nothing stronger -- that if they reached the wet season without being overthrown, that would stabilize the military situation at least for that period and that the other side might conclude that it would be better to negotiate a settlement rather than trying again in the next dry season to win a military victory.

Q Ron, Jack Hushen said the matter of a resolution of the Cambodian situation is not one of a lack of channels of communication. Would it be more accurate to say it is not one of lack of willingness on our part? Is that what it boils down to?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would quarrel with "our part" but certainly no lack of willingness on the part of the Cambodian government. I think that is certainly a good clarification.

Q Ron, news reports from South Vietnam say that there are major attacks going on by the North Vietnamese and suggesting that there may be an offensive in the making. Did Secretary Schlesinger confirm those news accounts?

MR. NESSEN: I say he did not even use the word "offensive."

Q What about the major attacks part of it?

MR. NESSEN: He talked in a very brief factual way about the situation in the central highlands, and I would say it is precisely what you read in the paper this morning and nothing beyond that.

Q Ron, did the subject of the economy or energy come up in the discussion at all?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Except for the food prices.

MR. NESSEN: Well, food prices, yes.

Q Did the Cabinet meeting last about an hour and a half or more?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What in the world did they talk about? What you have given us doesn't seem like it would last an hour and a half.

MR. NESSEN: Well, this took up a fair amount of the time.

Q Did this take up the bulk of the time?

MR. NESSEN: These items that I have given you? Oh, no, by no means. It took up eight minutes, five, ten minutes perhaps at the most.

Q Was there any discussion of what, if any, options the Administration would have left open to them if Congress does in fact say no?

MR. NESSEN: No, there was not.

Q Ron, could I make one more stab at these channels. When you use the phrase "channels of communication" do you mean intermediaries?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would just rather leave it the way it was. I think Frank helped to clarify it. There is no lack of willingness on our side to negotiate, but nobody on their side has come forward to negotiate, and if they wanted to there would be ways of getting in touch.

Q Ron, did anybody but Rockefeller participate in the give and take in this discussion?

MR. NESSEN: It was mostly reports.

Q Anything about the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 1:45 P.M. EDT)

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