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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:45 A.M. EDT

MARCH 14, 1975

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President's first appointment today, aside from staff meetings, was at 10:45 with Mr. Voldemar Petrovich Lein. He is the Soviet Minister of the Food Industry, and also with other leaders of the Soviet Food Processing Industry.

These gentlemen are here on a two-week tour of the United States at the invitation of private American industry. This was a chance for the President to emphasize to the delegation from the Soviet Union the importance he attaches to a mutually beneficial trade relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union and the importance of that trade relationship to an overall improvement in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

I think you took the pictures at the meeting.

At 11 o'clock, the President had a meeting with Secretary Schlesinger.

This afternoon, at 2 o'clock, the President is meeting with Secretary Morton and Director Lynn to discuss legislation. There will be a second meeting at 2:15 between the President, Secretary Weinberger and Director Lynn, to discuss legislation.

At 4 o'clock, the President is going to be host at a reception in the Residence for persons attending the National Newspaper Association Government Affairs Conference in Washington.

The President will have remarks, and we will have a text of those remarks.

Q Is that for coverage, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. There will be a somewhat enlarged pool with all the camers and a writing pool, which we will post. We should have the text in about an hour, I guess.

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Q Ron, on Mr. Schlesinger, I am told that he canceled an appearance before a Congressional committee. Is that correct? Was there an urgent call from the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't know what his schedule is for the rest of the day.

Q What is the meeting about? When was it set up?

MR. NESSEN: The President has his Cabinet members in whenever they feel a need to talk to him, and Secretary Schlesinger indicated he wanted to chat.

Q Is it about Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I suspect that would be one of the topics, anyway.

Q You say when they feel the need?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Secretary Schlesinger indicated he wanted to come in and talk a bit today.

Q Ron, are you saying the Defense Secretary asked for the meeting with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q On the morning that he was scheduled to be on the Hill to testify before the committee?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't think he requested the meeting today. I think he requested it -- well, not today, so prior to today.

Q But he did cancel his appearance before the Congressional committee this morning.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that, Ralph.

Q This morning at 10 o'clock, your office did not have him on the list. When was he added to the list?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, the President has people come in and see him frequently that don't appear on the official schedule and he was scheduled to come in today.

Q If they didn't appear on the official schedule, you don't tell us about it. Now, you are telling us about it.

MR. NESSEN: Somebody asked me about it.

Q Ron, isn't this a case where they did have something to talk about in a hurry and he did cancel that appearance on the Hill and come over here instead?

MR. NESSEN: I can't tell you what the rest of the schedule might have been, Jim. It was not scheduled in a hurry.

Q When did he schedule it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: As early as yesterday afternoon I knew he was coming today.

Q Was it an error, then, on the official White House schedule that his name was omitted?

MR. NESSEN: No. As I say, people often come in to see the President and their names don't appear on the official schedule.

Q Why did not the Secretary suggest to the Congress before this morning that he was not going to be able to make that appointment on the Hill, then?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Bob.

Q I mean, there is a conflict here because he did not notify Members of Congress that he was not going to make that meeting on the Hill, but you say the White House, in fact, had the schedule?

MR. NESSEN: Yesterday afternoon.

Q Are you absolutely certain that Mr. Schlesinger, in fact, had an appointment here yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Are you suggesting that --

Q There may be a misunderstanding.

MR. NESSEN: What I am telling you, Bob, is that yesterday afternoon his name was on the schedule.

I don't think I have faced a situation where my word has been doubted quite as forthrightly as that, Bob.

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Q What I am talking about is that possibly his name was on the schedule for a different time and that he didn't know until this morning that he was going to see the President at that time.

MR. NESSEN: Was the time changed of the meeting?

He was always on the schedule for this time. I don't think that I ought to talk about the Secretary's schedule of appearances on the Hill, but I am told that the fact he didn't go to the Hill today did not have anything to do with the fact that he had a meeting with the President scheduled for today.

Q Ron, would you tell us what the criteria are and who makes the decision on whether a person who sees the President gets on the public schedule and when he does not?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure what the exact criteria are, Mort, and I probably ought to check.

Q Ron, why don't you just put on everyone the President meets with? Why does there have to be a public and a private schedule?

MR. NESSEN: The President wants to see some people privately.

Q I don't understand. Like who?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand your question.

Q I mean, are there private citizens that he sees privately or Cabinet officers that he sees privately that he does not want anyone to know he is seeing?

MR. NESSEN: He has private meetings with a variety of people, including reporters.

Q Could I ask one more question on that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Who makes up the public schedule? Do you?

MR. NESSEN: The White House machinery, yes.

Q Who in the White House, can you say? Does the scheduling office make up the public schedule and make the decision what to announce and what not to announce?

MR. NESSEN: No, the scheduling officer does not.

Q Who does?

MR. NESSEN: It is kind of a consensus, primarily depending on who the President prefers to see privately.

Q Ron, I am sure you share our understanding about the very nature of this meeting because of what is going on in Indochina right now. This suggests that there has been some dramatic move or some sudden reappraisal. The secrecy surrounding this particular meeting suggests all kinds of things.

MR. NESSEN: It may very well, Rus, but I can only tell you what the facts are. The facts, as I know them, are that there is no sudden crisis in Cambodia. The meeting was not hurriedly scheduled. Those are the facts. Whatever may suggest itself to you --

Q Can you say whether Cambodia was discussed?

MR. NESSEN: I say I assume that was one of the subjects of discussion.

Q Ron, do you have any idea what came out of that discussion?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Lou.

Q His question was a sudden crisis in Indochina, and you answered in terms of Cambodia.

MR. NESSEN: Let me broaden that to say no sudden crisis in Cambodia, Indochina or anywhere else in the world.

Q Ron, you suggested, the way you put it, that you might know the reason why the Secretary canceled his appearance on the Hill.

MR. NESSEN: I am not involved in the Secretary's office -- but just to sort of try and perhaps point you in the direction where you could call somebody who would give you the reason -- I am told that he did not go to the Hill for some reason totally unrelated to his stop at the White House, but you do need to talk to Secretary Schlesinger's office about that.

Q Ron, in a more recent briefing you were asked a question, if the Congress refuses to approve the emergency assistance for Indochina, would the President act unilaterally, and your answer at that time was; No, the President will not act on his own to try to funnel supplies over there without the approval of Congress. Is that still the position of the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that exact exchange, Walt. I think the exchange was, "Is there anything the President can do on his own without Congressional approval," and I said, "Not as far as I know," and that is still the case.

Q Can you tell us anything in the positive sense about why this meeting was held? I mean, you say it was not hard to schedule and there was no sudden crisis. Then what did they have to discuss?

MR. NESSEN: I guess you have to ask Secretary Schlesinger. He requested the meeting, Dick. The President sees Cabinet members quite often. He is seeing Weinberger this afternoon. He is seeing other people.

Q But you have told us in general that it was legislation.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q But you have said virtually nothing about --

MR. NESSEN: I thought I had said that I suspect Cambodia will come up.

Q Were there other things to discuss as well?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't attend the meeting.

Q Ron, what is the Administration going to do now that there have been more setbacks on the Hill?

MR. NESSEN: I wonder if I could go ahead and finish the announcements today on this. We have a personnel announcement. Also, I think I told you about the speech at 4 o'clock in the East Room.

The President is designating Clyde S. DuPont of Arlington, Virginia, to be the Chairman of the Postal Rate Commission. He replaces Fred B. Rhodes, who resigned effective December 30, 1974.

Mr. DuPont was named the Acting Chairman by the President on January 14, and he has been on the Postal Rate Commission, but not as Chairman, since September 20, 1974.

We have five visiting journalists and editors from Spain with us at the briefing today, and we would like to welcome them here. They are here under the auspices of a State Department exchange program.

I have some information on Monday's trip. The check-in time at Andrews for the press is 8:15 a.m. The press plane leaves at 8:45. The President departs from the South Lawn by helicopter at 9:25, and he will take off from Andrews at 9:45.

You will be arriving in your plane at the South Bend Airport, which is known as the Michiana Regional Airport at 9:10 local time, which is an hour earlier than Eastern Time.

The President will arrive at the same place an hour later at 10:10 local time.

Those are all the announcements.

Q Is there any outlook on the text yet?

MR. NESSEN: I am hoping to get it on Saturday, which is tomorrow.

Q Ron, will it be available here for those of us who don't travel?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there anything that you can add, Ron, to the President's reaction that the Congressional action on his expression of disappointment as to what he is thinking about, what he is planning to do?

MR. NESSEN: He strongly disagrees with the action; he finds it regrettable. He hopes that wiser heads will prevail as the legislative process continues. He believes that aid for Cambodia is needed urgently and quickly so that they have a chance to survive, and he believes that it is needed promptly.

Q Ron, could I ask a question on Cambodia, please. Is there any specific compromise being thought of here? My second question is, is there any feeling that Mr. Ingersoll perhaps was too rigid yesterday in his testimony before the House committee and that perhaps this angered some Congressmen and led to the results?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand your first question on a compromise.

Q Is there any thought here of a new compromise formula, perhaps a change in funds, perhaps a change in dates?

MR. NESSEN: The President believes that aid is needed to give the Cambodians a chance to survive and he believes is needed quickly, and that is about all he wants to say about it.

Q You are talking about \$222 million.

MR. NESSEN: He believes aid is needed quickly for the Cambodians to give them a chance to survive.

Q Ron, what is the situation now between the White House and the Hill? Is the President or is the White House going to do anything further over the weekend and try to get this whole thing reconsidered? If so, what is it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely what they intend to do in Congress. You will have to ask up there. The President hopes, as I say, that wiser heads will prevail before it is over.

Q Legislative strategy? Does he plan to get back to the Foreign Affairs Committee sometime next week when they meet again?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I don't know what they plan to do, Walt.

Q Ron, may I repeat my second question about Mr. Ingersoll?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you read Mr. Ingersoll carefully, you will see that the question he was asked and the answer he gave related to which process did he prefer, the Senate bill or a bill with a cut-off in it, and he said the Senate bill. There was a preference of one against the other.

Q Ron, are you really sure you have no idea what the Hill is going to do? It seems fairly clear.

MR. NESSEN: I read in the paper, Bob, that they seem to be thinking of taking it up again next Tuesday, and at that point the President does hope that wiser heads will prevail.

Q Is the President planning personal contact with members of that committee between now and then?

MR. NESSEN: He is in contact with Members of Congress quite often.

Q You would not characterize any possible contact as out of the ordinary or perhaps an extra push to try and find these wiser heads that you are talking about?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know what he plans in that area.

Q Ron, last night when the President dropped in on that labor-industry dinner, he seemed to go a good deal farther than you seem to be willing to go this morning. He spoke of an atmosphere of compromise being in the air in Washington and so forth and so on.

Why does the President give on one night and you take away again in the morning?

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MR. NESSEN: I don't know that I have taken anything away.

Q Were you looking for a compromise here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that I have taken anything away and I don't know that you really need to go beyond that. The President speaks for himself clearly.

Q You were asked whether there was a possibility of a compromise and you answered, "The President believes aid is needed quickly for the Cambodians in order to give them a chance to survive," which does not reply to the question that was asked.

MR. NESSEN: Does that really take away from what the President said? I don't think it does.

Q Well, it does not reply to the question of whether a compromise is possible.

MR. NESSEN: Why would you need any words other than the President's own, Jim?

Q I am not asking for further words. I am asking why you won't go as far as he went last night.

MR. NESSEN: Why do I need to, Jim? The President spoke for himself last night. Wouldn't you rather have his opinion than mine? I thought you indicated that yesterday.

Q The question is what form this compromise might take.

MR. NESSEN: Let me say that the President spoke for himself last night. What he wanted to get over this morning was what I have told you, and I guess there is not really anything else to say on that issue.

Q Ron, earlier this week you were asked whether in the communications between the White House and the Secretary of State the matter of Cambodia came up and at that time, without trying to be precise, you indicated that you either did not know, or had not seen, the cable. I am wondering since then whether you know?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I had said yesterday that the Secretary is in touch two or three times a day and part of the communications involve Cambodia.

Q Thank you.

MR. NESSEN: Fran?

Q Ron, can you tell us whether this government or the President has heard anything through its channels that might be similar to the statement given to Jane Fonda, and so on, by Sihanouk, that if the United States would help to remove from the area the Lon Nol leaders that they might be able to avoid a blood bath, and what is the reaction, if you have any?

MR. NESSEN: I think what we have said, Fran, before, and it holds today, it is up to the Cambodians to change their government if they desire to.

Q Has this government heard any such proposal from Sihanouk or anyone else?

MR. NESSEN: Ron, is it possible that Dr. Kissinger might be involved in the effort to weigh Congressional approval of aid for Cambodia even though he is miles away?

MR. NESSEN: What do you have in mind, Mort?

Q Might he make some crucial transoceanic telephone calls on behalf of Cambodian aid? I mean, is it that important?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any.

Q Is there any further plan of the President to make some kind of extraordinary appeal here either to the public by television broadcast or to key Congressional leaders who are opposed to him, some extraordinary measure to avert this cut-off of aid?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any, Lou. He stated his views pretty clearly at the beginning of a news conference last week and he relays his views through me almost daily, and he does have these contacts with people on the Hill.

He also has his aides testifying on the Hill and has people in his legislative office talking to people on the Hill. I don't think there is any lack of knowledge on the Hill as to what his views are.

Q Ron, would the President accept a time cut-off in Cambodian aid as part of a compromise?

MR. NESSEN: The President believes that aid is needed urgently and quickly to give the Cambodians a chance to survive.

Q Would he agree to some cut-off date in the future in return for aid promptly and quickly now, as you say?

MR. NESSEN: He just thinks the aid is needed quickly to help the Cambodians survive.

Q Ron, you are suggesting by that remark that he will accept aid urgently under any circumstances, that that is the primary and almost the only consideration?

MR. NESSEN: I don't suggest anything, Mort. I am saying what the President believes. His position today is what it was yesterday and the day before, and will be tomorrow. So I don't know that this is really very useful.

Walt?

Q Is it possible that perhaps the White House has not really decided what to do as far as legislative strategy goes next week before the House Foreign Affairs Committee? Can we assume that that is the reason for your answer on the compromise?

MR. NESSEN: I say that all of this is really sort of silly. The President's position has remained unchanged, is unchanged, and will be unchanged. I don't know where we are going, actually, with the question.

Q Will he have anything to say on Monday about Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the speech yet, Mort.

Q Do you know what the topic of the speech is?

MR. NESSEN: In general terms.

Q Is it foreign policy?

MR. NESSEN: It is a speech on America's role in the world.

Q Are you going to offer anything to us? I know you don't want to change the topic, but do you want to offer anything on the economy, any developments on energy? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is the best invitation I have had all day.

Q Well, do you want to take me up on it?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just --

Q I have a specific question if you want a specific question. Reuters is carrying a story this morning that North Vietnam --

Q Do you want to answer this one?

MR. NESSEN: That is a good point that Jack makes. Jack points out that the speech last night in which the President spoke of an atmosphere of compromise pervading Washington had to do with the tax cut and not Cambodia.

Q No, I thought the atmosphere was sort of a general atmosphere, not a specialized atmosphere.

MR. NESSEN: Speaking of a tax cut, I understand the Senate is not in session today and won't be tomorrow or Sunday, and there are seven days left before the scheduled Easter recess, and a tax cut has not been passed.

Tomorrow is 60 days since the President proposed the anti-recession tax cut. There has been no final action on it, or Senate committee action. People are still waiting for money that they can buy things with and money for companies that can be used to increase their production and hire people back with.

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Q Ron, what is the Administration's position on the \$2,000 tax credit for home buyers?

MR. NESSEN: The President's position from the beginning has been that this tax cut ought to be simple, quick, and large enough to stimulate the economy. He said from the beginning that if you began dragging in extraneous issues, tried to load it up with something for everybody, it would simply delay the tax cut and just keep people from getting the spending money.

Specifically, as for this proposal, the Administration thinks it is an inferior way of stimulating the economy to pull it out of the recession. It would also be an unfair way. It would be, in effect, a new windfall or a new loophole that would benefit only about a million people. These people presumably would buy a house anyhow, and you are creating a new loophole and a new windfall.

There has been a great deal of talk on the Hill about centering the tax cut on the low income groups, but presumably this tax loophole or windfall would go to people who buy \$100,000 houses or \$200,000 houses. If Congress wants to stimulate the housing industry, as the President does, the way to do it is to make sure that interest rates don't go so high that people can't afford to buy houses; to keep inflation from running ahead as fast as it was, and the way to do that is to hold the Federal deficit down so that the government is not competing for money and driving the interest rates up.

Q Ron, will he veto anything like this?

MR. NESSEN: It has a long way to go, Ralph, in the legislative process.

Q Ron, the Federal Reserve Board has a major impact on interest rates. I know the President has seen Arthur Burns several times in the past few weeks. In these sessions, does he suggest that the Fed ease up or take steps to bring interest rates lower?

MR. NESSEN: I guess every time the question is asked, Gaylord, I give the answer which is that the Federal Reserve is independent and the President understands and respects its independence and does not presume to tell Arthur Burns what to do about interest rates.

Q Can I rephrase that question another way to leave Arthur Burns out of it entirely since he is independent.

MR. NESSEN: He is what?

Q He is independent.

MR. NESSEN: Oh. I thought you said a dependent.

Q Independent according to you. I would like to rephrase it to leave him out altogether and ask you, is the President himself satisfied that interest rates are coming down fast enough?

MR. NESSEN: Let me answer this way, because it is something the President feels strongly about. If Congress increases the deficit more than it already is, you can drive interest rates up that way. That will abort a recovery and prevent people from being able to afford houses.

Q So I am told, but that is not my question. My question is: Is the President satisfied with the current situation -- not something that might or might not happen in the future-- the current situation which has seen a downward trend interest rates?

Is he satisfied that that trend has been rapid enough? Is he satisfied with the pace of that trend? Does he think it should be faster, slower or is he happy with it the way it is?

MR. NESSEN: He is pleased that interest rates are coming down.

Q Is he satisfied with the pace at which they have come down?

MR. NESSEN: I have not really asked him that specific question, Jim, and I probably ought to.

Q Ron, the Commerce Department put out some figures this morning showing that in January, for the first month since some time in January 1970, business inventories declined due largely to the auto rebate program and that sort of thing. Does the White House have any reaction to this as a hopeful economic sign?

MR. NESSEN: I think when Dr. Greenspan spoke the other day, and also I guess Bill Seidman has spoken recently on one or two encouraging signs -- certainly not by any means trying to paint a rosy picture -- there are one or two signs in the economy that perhaps, as Dr. Greenspan said, the bottoming out is about on schedule. That would be one of them.

The inflation rate has fallen, as Jim points out. Interest rates are down dramatically in the short-term, and somewhat less in the long-term.

There was a real gain in retail sales in January for the first time in some months. Money is flowing into savings and loans at a greatly increased rate. Housing starts went up 13 percent in January. The automobile industry's rebate plan seems to have helped their sales.

There has been a weakening -- not a weakening, but, as you say, a sell-off of inventories, which is essential before the real upturn comes. So, those are the few little hopeful signs that are seen.

Q Ron, the answer is always the same about Burns and his independence. Yet Burns comes to these meetings and goes on the Hill and is never reluctant to give his advice. Doesn't the President feel the same freedom to give Mr. Burns advice that Mr. Burns seems to have?

Seriously, why shouldn't the President tell Arthur Burns what he thinks ought to be happening in the Fed if Mr. Burns can come down here and tell the White House what ought to be happening?

MR. NESSEN: Steve, you know the answer to that, I think.

Q There is a precedent to that. In 1966, Lyndon Johnson called Bill McChestney Martin down to San Antonio and chewed him out about a 6-1/2 percent interest rate, and there was some change. There is some precedent for an exchange between the President and the Federal Reserve Board.

Q Ron, on this same subject, what is the President's views or position on the Congress to reduce or end the independence of the Federal Reserve Board? Does he support or oppose that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he has any position on that, Gaylord.

Q Can you check that?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Ron, Walter Hiller, and apparently some other Democratic Congressmen, are at the Council of Economic Advisers today. Does the President intend to drop in on that meeting, or does he have any other representatives at that meeting? Is he aware of it?

MR. NESSEN: Which meeting is this now?

Q Walter Heller, as I understand it, said this morning at a breakfast that he was coming over to the White House today and have some conferences with Administration economists.

MR. NESSEN: I think that is probably the quarterly meeting that Bill Seidman has with outside economists. I guess it is quarterly. It may be more irregular than that, but he does have the regular series of meetings with outside economists. I think that what it is.

Q Does the President get feedback from those meetings?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes.

Q Is the President going to drop in on that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, if I can make one more try at this problem of Cambodian aid. Yesterday Mr. Ingersol was interpreted by some as indicating the Administration does not wish to compromise in any way; that if it can't get what it wants and what it has asked for, that it does not want any aid at all.

MR. NESSEN: Have you read the Secretary's testimony, Bob? Have you read the Secretary's testimony?

Q Yes, I have.

MR. NESSEN: Have you?

Q Yes, I have, as a matter of fact, and I am saying as interpreted by some."

MR. NESSEN: How do you interpret it?

Q As having said that.

MR. NESSEN: Do you interpret --

Q Can I ask the questions?

MR. NESSEN: We were having a dialogue, I thought.

Q We don't seem to be because we don't seem to be communicating.

MR. NESSEN: Some are.

Q What I would like to ask --

MR. NESSEN: He said what he said Bob said -- that if he had a choice he preferred --

Q I said interpreted.

MR. NESSEN: But I am saying what he said was that he preferred the Senate bill over the cut-off date.

Q All right. Let me ask you what is the Administration's position on a compromise?

MR. NESSEN: The way I want to answer that question is that the Administration believes that aid to Cambodia is needed urgently and quickly, and that is what the President hopes Congress will pass.

Q As long as we are back in Indochina, Reuters is carrying a story that said North Vietnam hinted that it would be willing to trade information on MIAs to the United States in an exchange for an end to U.S. aid to South Vietnam, this in a letter to Senator Edward Kennedy.

Does the Administration have any comment on this sort of back door diplomacy on MIAs?

MR. NESSEN: The letter that you are referring to, or the position reported in the letter, is a total violation of the Paris peace accords, and it is another indication of the bad faith by the North Vietnamese.

Under the Paris accords, they are supposed to give any information they may have on those Missing in Action, and they are supposed to allow American inspection teams to go to crash sites and so forth to find out what they can find. If they are dangling this idea that they have more information in a letter to Senator Kennedy, they clearly are violating what they are supposed to do under the Paris accords.

As I understand it, what they say is we will give you the information if you throw out President Thieu. This certainly is an appalling lack of humanitarian concern for the families of these men who are missing.

Just to make sure you understand one other point, the United States has no hard evidence that there are any living MIAs, and there is nothing in the letter, as I read it, that suggests there are.

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Q Be that as it may, Ron, the point of it is that for these families, the best relief these families seek is getting these men home. What is the President going to do about this?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, I think I said a moment ago that there is no hard evidence that there are any living MIAs.

Q That does not mean that it is not there, though. What is he going to do about this? Is he going to try now, assuming the fact -- which is perfectly possible -- that from the way they have acted recently the North Vietnamese have the hard evidence and have the hard facts and are keeping them from us because that is the way they indicated in those talks with some of those Congressmen who went over there. What is the President going to do about this?

MR. NESSEN: It seems to me that the North Vietnamese --

Q Not taking your rationale, just take what will the President do about this. Did he say today when he gave you those words to come out here and read -- did he say he was going to do something about this?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the President's concern about MIAs, Sarah.

Q I have known it in the past, but I want to know it on the basis of this new development.

MR. NESSEN: Do you think he has lessened his feeling for MIAs?

Q No, I don't, but I just want to know what he is going to do now.

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, the thing to do is if the North Vietnamese have information about MIAs, they ought to live up to the Paris peace accords and give it and not hold it up as a --

Q Has the White House received a copy of the letter from the Kennedy office?

MR. NESSEN: I believe it was written to Senator Kennedy, as far as I know.

Q No, my question was, has the White House received a copy of the letter?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Is the White House objecting at all to Senator Kennedy's role in this and are your remarks entirely directed to the North Vietnamese or do you think there is anything that Senator Kennedy might be able to do here to help get more information?

MR. NESSEN: My remarks are directed solely at the North Vietnamese.

Q Ron, when General Westmoreland was in the Oval Office yesterday, did the President tell him our involvement in Indochina has ended?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely what the President told him except I did talk to General Westmoreland, and he said that the things he had told you outside he had told the President in the office and that the President had not made any comment, had not agreed with him in any way and that these views in no way represented the President's views. He understood that.

Q He also said that the President was most interested in what he had to say. Did the President discuss that with you this morning?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, I think you told us yesterday that General Westmoreland had asked for the appointment.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q General Westmoreland told us that the President had asked for it.

MR. NESSEN: If you recall, I think what General Westmoreland said was that when General Westmoreland had his heart attack on the West Coast, I told you that the President had called his wife and had said to his wife, "When the General is well, I will call him and I would also like him to come into the White House when he is well."

He is now well and he called the other day to say he was up here for an examination and this would be the time for the visit. So, he came.

Q So, the President did ask him, first, before General Westmoreland's --

MR. NESSEN: The President, at the time of his heart attack, expressed an interest in seeing him when he was well.

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Q Is General Westmoreland being considered for, or seeking, a Federal position of any sort?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by that.

Q I have heard that he -- somebody had a better answer. What was it?

No, I am not referring to the political situation in the State. I am referring to a Federal position.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any Federal position for the General.

Q Ron, to change the subject slightly, there is a piece on the wire today that an executive of the New York Federal Reserve Bank is now advocating a dramatic tax benefit for business in order to get the wheels of industry turning again. Has the President considered this, and does he have any ideas on it?

MR. NESSEN: As I have said, the President believes that the time is overdue for a tax cut. Congress has taken 59 days, tomorrow will be 60 days. They are not meeting today, tomorrow or Sunday. They are going on an Easter holiday next week. I cannot understand why they don't pass this tax bill and give people their money back.

Q This is something different.

MR. NESSEN: No, the tax bill that he proposed, proposed tax cuts for business, too.

Q Ron, is there any movement on the Church request for CIA-related documents, including the Colby report?

MR. NESSEN: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:17 P.M. EDT)