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NEWS CONFERENCE

#181

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:15 A.M. PDT

APRIL 1, 1975

TUESDAY

(Palm Springs, California)

MR. NESSEN: For those who came in late, that was Phil Habib. We had the briefing piped in from Washington so you could hear what he had to say about the Indochina situation. We did not announce it ahead of time because I did not know if we would be able to string all the wires together, but we are making a transcript. As soon as they can get it stenciled and put together we will pass it out for your convenience.

You have a packet of material which includes the President's intention to nominate John A. Hill to be Deputy Administrator of the Federal Energy Administration, and you have a biography of John. You also have the President's intention to nominate Gorman C. Smith to be Assistant Administrator of the Federal Energy Administration, and you have a biography of that.

You also have the President's intention to appoint Rod Hills to be Counsel to the President. He will be a deputy to Phil Buchen. He will handle the whole range of matters in the Legal Counsel's Office.

You have two letters from the President to the Secretary of Labor relating to a ruling that two shoe companies are entitled to a minor adjustment in assistance because of competition in imports, and John Carlson is here to fill in those who are interested in the details of that.

You have an Executive Order which extends the reporting date of the Rockefeller Commission on CIA activities to June 6, 1975. You also have an Executive Order on the establishment of the collective bargaining committee in the construction industry, and John Carlson also will be able to help you with any further details you may need on that.

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Immediately following this briefing we will have two further releases relating to the declaration of disaster areas in Texas and Arkansas as a result of tornadoes there. That is being prepared now and will be ready for you when the briefing is over.

As the pool perhaps has reported to you, the President is playing golf this morning in a foursome which includes Fred Wilson, whose house the President is renting; Leon Parma, who is a guest who is staying with the President and Mrs. Ford at that house and as you know is an old friend of the Presidents' and with a gentleman named Frank Jameson, who is an official of a company in Beverly Hills called the Tool Research and Engineering Corporation.

Q Where is that company located?

MR. NESSEN: In Beverly Hills.

Q Who is his wife, Ron?

Q And what are the rest of his plans for the-day??

MR. NESSEN: The rest of his plans for the day are to return to the house after golf and to have some meetings with Don Rumsfeld and do some work at the house this afternoon.

Q How about tonight?

MR. NESSEN: Tonight the Fords have invited some friends in for dinner, so they will stay home and have the friends for dinner tonight.

Q Who are they?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the full list, but it is sort of the people you know about who he has been acquainted with, including the Parmas, of course, and the Wilsons and Frank Capra, the director; Mr. and Mrs. Bob Hope, the Jamesons and Red Blaik and some others.

Q Frank Sinatra?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Eva Gabor?

MR. NESSEN: Eva Gabor will be there.

Q Will it be buffet style?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Helen, but Sheila Weidenfeld is here and can help you with the social details.

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I would like, if I may, to mildly complain, I guess -- for lack of a better word -- about the way some stories were written concerning my answer yesterday when asked, "How did the President assess the situation in Vietnam."

What I said was, "I know he feels the pullback of the South Vietnamese forces to a line which President Thieu feels indefensible was caused by two things. One, the violations of the Paris accords by the North Vietnamese, and secondly by the affect on the morale of the South Vietnamese of the prospect of no further American ammunition and equipment which would enable them to fight for their own survival." .. .

What I did not say was that President Ford blamed the collapse of Southeast Asia on Congressional failure to vote aid for South Vietnam.

Q Would you repeat that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: This is just a really kind of bookkeeping thing here where I am saying I think some of the stories tended to overwrite, perhaps, and put too fine a point on, and really go beyond what I said of the President's views.

There was another story which I feel comes much closer to what I said which is along the lines that President Ford said the military crisis is in part a result of weakened morale in Saigon's armed forces caused by U.S. Congressional disapproval -- and so forth. Anyhow, this is no major thing.

What I am saying is that after all, this is a sensitive and emotional issue, and the President, when he relays his views to you, either in person or through me, carefully selects his words so that they are an accurate reflection of what he believes, and I try to use words for their exact meanings, and I think I did yesterday -- in reviewing the transcript -- accurately and carefully reflect to you what his thoughts on this matter were. I have a slight concern that that was carried just a bit beyond what he feels and what he intended to say. I just really, in a very friendly and mild manner, feel that on something like this we need to be careful; that if I take care to reflect accurately and with a careful choice of words his thoughts, that there is then an obligation to be equally careful in reporting his words and thoughts

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Q Ron, if the English language means anything, every official we know has blamed the Congress in part for what has happened in South Vietnam. Aren't you splitting hairs when you go through this exercise you have just gone through?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I don't think so. I think you and I both share a great respect for the exact meaning of words. I know you use them carefully, and I certainly do, on something like this. What I did not say was the President blames Congress for the collapse of Southeast Asia. What I did say was he feels there are two reasons for what has happened; the clear, mammoth violation of the peace accords by North Vietnam and secondly, the effect on morale of the South Vietnamese Army of the prospect of no more aid.

I said that and I meant that. And I said it that way because the President feels that way and I am sure we do not disagree on the general proposition that the President's thoughts on a matter this sensitive should be carefully and accurately reported.

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Q Does he believe Congress is not to blame, then?

MR. NESSEN: He believes precisely what I said yesterday.

Q No, I mean it was Congress' failure to vote the aid, was it not?

MR. NESSEN: I believe I was asked the exact same question yesterday and I went out of my way to say that there is no fixing of blame, although one story I read said that yesterday's little statement by me represented the first attribution of blame. I thought I had gone out of my way to say there was no fixing of blame.

Q Is there a third factor involved of over-assessment or failure to accurately assess by American military and perhaps diplomatic officials, the ability of the South Vietnamese forces to hack it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how that would, if it were true, even then have any effect on the situation on the ground.

Q You don't subscribe to the government putting out poorly based information on the ability of the South Vietnamese forces to fight?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, if it were true, I don't know how it would affect the situation on the ground.

Q Ron, did the President talk to you about some of these stories and object to the way they were reported?

MR. NESSEN: No. He did not. This is purely just our little group here, I hope in a somewhat low key, reflecting my thoughts.

As you well know, on Friday, the President is going to San Francisco for a number of events, including a speech in the evening and a luncheon with Governors and a visit to a geothermal facility. We will have the exact schedule and times for you as we go along, but I understand from yesterday there was some feeling that the President had visited Elk Hills, not because of a genuine interest in Elk Hills, but to stage a media event and had not the reporters been there, the President would not have gone.

The fact is that the President went because he was very interested, and he has been for a long time, in the development of Elk Hills, and he is going on Friday because he is very interested in the potential for geothermal-generated power.

I think I reported to the pool on the helicopter when there were no reporters around and no need to say anything other than what he really felt, he told Assistant Secretary Bowers that he was really glad he had come; that there is no substitute for seeing this firsthand; that it was much better than looking at all the charts he had looked at.

The development of Elk Hills is an important part of his energy proposal. What I am leading up to is, he is going to see the geothermal field and if there are any who feel that they don't want to cover the geothermal field, we need to know because there is a limited number of seats on the helicopter going up. He is going regardless of whether reporters go or not.

Maybe we could get some indication of whether anybody wants to go and maybe we could cancel the helicopter.

Q Ron, since it is only our little group here, we all have to go if we can, whether we want to go or not, since it is our job out here to cover it.

MR. NESSEN: I am making the point that since there does seem to be a feeling that he is only going because of reporters --

Q Who said that?

MR. NESSEN: Moving on, we will have a sign-up for that trip and any who don't want to go obviously will not sign up.

Q Where is the geothermal field?

MR. NESSEN: It is North of San Francisco, or West of San Francisco.

Q What is the field?

MR. NESSEN: It is a field in which steam comes out of the ground, Dick.

Q They are geysers, aren't they?

MR. NESSEN: Geyser is another word for it. We are going to have a sign-up list after this briefing for people who want to ask questions at San Diego and we will have a drawing sometime in the next few days, but Thymwill post that right after the briefing.

Q Have you got anything on the new Interior Secretary for us yet?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

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Q Can we have all the times of these trips so we can do some planning?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. We are making headway on getting those, Helen.

Q Ron, what time is the press conference in San Diego? Do you know yet?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it is noon, local time.

Q Can we get in two questions, now?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I would like to rephrase Tom Jarriell's question. I can see the two factors you mentioned for the collapse or the retreat of the South Vietnamese Army. I would like to know how the President feels a possible third factor, namely, the failure of a policy of a previous administration called Vietnamization. Is that not a factor in the retreat and the collapse of the South Vietnamese army?

MR. NESSEN: The policy of the Vietnamization?

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Q Isn't also a factor in the collapse of the South Vietnamese army the fact that Vietnamization of the Vietnam war has failed?

MR. NESSEN: The South Vietnamese have been defending themselves totally without American direct help since 1973, for total withdrawal, so that is two years or so. They were defending themselves, and then there was an enormous invasion and they at least had some doubts about the continuation of the ammunition and equipment they needed, so I would say that I don't see that that was a factor.

Q Ron, is another factor -- and I am not sure of the research on this, it is only a quote from Senator Cranston -- he claims the Administration failed to spend very much of the money Congress approved for Vietnam, a figure something like \$700 million for this fiscal year that ends this year, but is only spending about \$200 million. Is that a factor?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is not correct. The intention is to spend the full \$700 million that Congress appropriated. Some of that money is committed, and the ammunition and so forth is in the pipeline. The idea is to spread the \$700 million through the end of the fiscal year.

Q But my point is, wouldn't it have been better to have spread it sooner? It seems it is going to get there a little late under the planning and distribution you have now. Is that not a factor?

MR. NESSEN: Until three weeks ago, I guess there was no North Vietnamese invasion to defend against, and it was being shipped in a timely maneuver. You will need to check with the Pentagon for whatever plans they might have to revise the shipping schedule.

Q Ron, there is a report in the paper today, the L.A. Times, that U.S. officials out of Saigon are warning of a possible panic in Saigon and collapse of the government there, and I wonder one, if the President has received that warning, and two, what is the White House assessment of the situation in Saigon?

MR. NESSEN: You had an interview with Schlesinger last night in which he did assess the situation there. The President, of course, gets his morning intelligence report. General Weyand is over there making a very careful survey of the situation, both in terms of the outlook and morale and a total assessment of the situation. He will be back here to report to the President sometime before the week is over. I don't have the exact date yet.

Q Ron, the fact that President Thieu today cancelled his meeting and refused to see the General, do you have any comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't. I saw a wire report to that effect, but I have no confirmation that that happened.

Q Does the President share the report that Nguyen Cao Ky blamed poor leadership in Saigon for what happened?

MR. NESSEN: I have given you what I understand to be the President's views.

Q Ron, do you know what the purpose of Secretary Kissinger calling in Dean Rusk and McNamara and Cyrus Vance and a host of other former Administration officials yesterday? Was it done with the President's approval, and what was the purpose of that, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I think you need to check State on what the purpose of it was. From here it is not possible to tell. They do have their own press people at the State Department.

Q Was the President consulted?

MR. NESSEN: The President knew about it, yes.

Q Ron, do you have any further assessment from the President since yesterday -- you talked to us yesterday -- any comment that he has to make about the Vietnamese situation that you would like to share with us?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is Kissinger coming, and when?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime before the week is over. I don't have an exact date for that.

Q Ron, is the report correct that he is coming out here earlier than was planned because of Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: There was never any set date, so I think it is not possible to say that he is coming earlier or later than planned. There was no date set. Part of it depends on how long it takes General Weyand to make a complete assessment in Saigon.

Q Ron, is that Kissinger meeting yesterday related to the immediate situation in South Vietnam or is it part of the preparation for the foreign policy report to Congress?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I have no way of knowing from here. You have to check the State Department.

Q Can't you call them up and ask them what the purpose was?

MR. NESSEN: I can do that, yes, but you all have State Department reporters who cover the State Department.

Q They are not getting it out there. They tried.

Q Ron, also this seems to me to be a rather unusual meeting where the top level officials of at least two and three administrations are called in by the Secretary of State and not by the President. It seems to me the President ought to be curious about what the purposes of that were so you could report it to us. Is that an unreasonable request?

MR. NESSEN: It is not unreasonable, Peter. I will check Dr. Kissinger after this briefing and see what I can find out for you.

Q Ron, when you came out on the plane on Saturday night, you said that as far as you knew, the President believes the Thieu government can survive and that Thieu himself should remain the head of that government. Do you still stand by that?

MR. NESSEN: Could I see what I said?

Q I am looking at the report here. When asked about the Thieu government, you replied "As far as I know," and of Thieu, you said, "He is the elected head of the government. What does he have to do with the Communist approach?"

MR. NESSEN: That is a little different than the way you said it the first time, but okay. What is the question?

Q Do you stand by that today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You think the Saigon government will hold?

MR. NESSEN: What did I say Sunday?

Q Asked if the President thinks the Thieu government can survive, Nessen replied, "As far as I know."

MR. NESSEN: That is true.

Q Ron, you said that the President was consulted on this meeting with Kissinger and the other people. Was he told after the meeting? Was he asked whether or not he thought it was a good idea? Was it his idea in the first place?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check a little more on the meeting, Phil. I don't have those answers.

Q Has the President been getting any direct reports or indirect reports from General Weyand, and if not, why not?

MR. NESSEN: General Weyand will bring back a full report and give it to the President in person.

Q Ron, I asked you if you thought the failure of Vietnamization was a third factor in the equation of the collapse of the South Vietnamese armies, and you said, "I don't think that was a factor." Is that an acknowledgement by you that the Vietnamization policy engineered by Secretary Kissinger during the previous administration has failed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so, Walt.

Q I asked you if the failure of Vietnamization was a factor, and you said, "I don't think it was a factor." I am asking, is that an acknowledgement by you --

MR. NESSEN: I thought I started off that answer by saying that even if it were true that Vietnamization has failed --

Q Have you found out yet, Ron, whether the President has talked to Secretary Kissinger over the past several days?

MR. NESSEN: He has talked to Washington a number of times.

Q Has he talked with the Secretary?

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked out each and every phone call he has made.

Q Has the President changed his plans in any way since he has been here in terms of the developing situation? I mean, is he not a bit worried about what the look of his playing golf, in view of this crisis, would have on his Administration?

MR. NESSEN: What the look of his playing golf would have on the situation in Vietnam?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that his personal activities would have any effect on the military situation in Vietnam, Helen.

Q Ron, has a time been set for the foreign policy speech to Congress next week yet?

MR. NESSEN: The 9th or the 10th is still the date.

Q Ron, to get back to Helen's question, she was not asking you whether his playing golf has any effect on the situation in South Vietnam. She was asking you about the public perception of a President playing golf while a "client" state seems to be going down the drain. Is your answer the same there?

MR. NESSEN: Would it prevent anything from happening in Vietnam if he did not play golf, Peter?

Q That still begs the question. The question is, is the President concerned about how the public views him in a place like Palm Springs when Danang and other places are being pictured in complete chaos.

MR. NESSEN: He is spending time every day on this problem, and other problems.

Q How much time is accorded to Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: He spent from about 7:00 until he left for the golf course on business. As soon as he returns, he has a full afternoon of business, all afternoon.

Q Ron, I think we have asked every day whether or not the President has talked to Secretary Kissinger and each day, you say something to the effect that you have not checked. Can we assume that you are not going to answer that question?

MR. NESSEN: He talks to a lot of people in Washington. I don't think it has been our policy to give a phone log of who he talks to. He is keeping fully informed on this. I don't understand why there is any doubt that he is keeping fully informed.

Q I am asking, can we assume you are not going to tell us if he has? That is the only question I am asking.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I am going to give a run-down on the President's phone log each day.

Q Is there an assumption that Lon Nol will come to Washington eventually?

MR. NESSEN: There is very little information that we have on Lon Nol's plans. I understand that he is going to Indonesia for a rest and then he will come to Hawaii, I understand, for medical treatment.

This is a private, unofficial visit, and beyond that, we have very little details of what he plans to do. I am also told -- and again I suppose all I am doing is relaying to you a news report -- Sihanouk has said in Peking that this makes no difference; that there will still be no negotiations. He does not plan any negotiations despite the departure of Lon Nol.

Q Ron, that raises another question.

MR. NESSEN: I am relaying to you a news report, Peter.

Q Do we regard Sihanouk as head of the Khmer Rouge now?

MR. NESSEN: I was only relaying to you a news report.

Q Why? Because it confuses the matter?

MR. NESSEN: Because I have been asked almost every day, "Why don't we get in touch with Sihanouk? Why don't we start negotiations with Sihanouk?" I thought since I heard this report before I came out here I would pass it on to you. You will see it on the wires, yourself.

Q Ron, the pattern of your answers over the last couple of days about Vietnam indicates the President believes this is totally beyond his control. There is nothing he can say or do to influence events there. Does he feel that way?

MR. NESSEN: I think that might properly be a question to save for your opportunity to ask him directly.

Q Ron, do you have any statement on that press conference for this week? Does the President plan any kind of formal statement himself on his current assessment of the situation in Vietnam, any report to the American people? Is he going to tell us anything about it?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure he is going to reply to your questions. As far as a formal statement goes, right now I don't know of any plans.

Q Are there any plans for Secretary Kissinger to come out before the news conference?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so, Phil.

Q Ron, have you talked to the President about the Vietnam situation today?

MR. NESSEN: Frequently, yes.

Q No, I meant today.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I have.

Q Could you give us anything at all fresh on the recent developments? After all, there has been the fall of the third largest city now since yesterday, and the North Vietnamese are apparently streaming down the coast and the situation is fairly acute. Could you give us his reaction today to what is happening?

MR. NESSEN: One thing he said was he was waiting for General Weyand's report, so he can get a full, firsthand assessment of what is happening there. He mentioned that obviously this North Vietnamese invasion has been planned and forces for it have been built up for some time, and that he had asked for the \$300 million sometime ago, and also that he feels it would have had an effect on South Vietnamese morale.

He mentioned that the American Embassy in Saigon is spending a good deal of its time on refugee problems and how to handle refugee problems, and the fact that the Americans are all gone from these areas which are under attack and falling is one reason why the information is somewhat sketchy. The other reason is the American Embassy in Saigon is devoting almost all of its time to refugee problems.

He mentioned that there have been, and are, ongoing diplomatic efforts to have a negotiated settlement, but all these efforts have been futile, so far.

Q How can he say that when he has not made any move to reconvene anything?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, there are ways of undertaking diplomatic initiatives that do not involve a reconvening of the Paris signatories. He also pointed out again that he had tried in January to have the Paris signatories persuade North Vietnam to give up its violations without any success.

Q Are these negotiations to get started between North and South Vietnam again? Is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go into the details of it all that much, but there are diplomatic initiatives that are continuing.

Q Ron, is the President affected by what is happening in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I think all of us who have any feelings for humanity are affected by what is happening there. He certainly is affected by what is happening.

Q Are you saying there are negotiations or there are efforts?

MR. NESSEN: There are diplomatic initiatives that have been, and are going on.

Q Could you tell us, Ron, where and with whom? That is rather important, I think.

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I cannot, because, as you know, diplomatic initiatives need to be carried on quietly. So far, I will say they have been futile.

Q Ron, you say the North Vietnamese invasion has been planned and the forces have been built up for some time. Can you tell us if the Administration knew of that before or after the fact of the invasion?

MR. NESSEN: I think for the exact timing and so forth, Tom, the Pentagon can help you, but I do not know. I know what you are asking, and I don't know the answer to it.

Q The second part of it is, if you knew before the invasion, why was the timely distribution of American equipment not accelerated?

MR. NESSEN: I said I don't know when the United States acquired the knowledge of this build-up in preparation for the invasion.

Q Ron, when you say diplomatic efforts are going for negotiated settlement, what do you mean -- cease-fire or coalition government? What precisely do you mean?

MR. NESSEN: An effort to persuade North Vietnam, among other things, to live up to the Paris accords, which certainly forbids what they are doing.

Q Do you have any feeling or any reports that the Saigon government is being destabilized? In view of the fact that Thieu did not see General Weyand, are our communications breaking down? Are we in direct touch with Thieu, or is there a political situation evolving there?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, that is really something that I do not think I can give you very accurate reports on from here. The United States Embassy certainly is in contact with the Thieu government.

Q Ron, you have been asked about reports that South Vietnamese marines have fired on the President's photographer as he was taking a helicopter flight over that area.

MR. NESSEN: Have I been asked about the reports?

Q I don't know if those reports are accurate. There were some we were hearing yesterday. I was wondering if you heard if they are accurate and, if so, if you have some comment on it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any comment on it.

Q Ron, I realize you said there was the necessity that negotiations have to be carried on quietly, but will you tell us --

MR. NESSEN: There are no negotiations going on, Dick. Diplomatic initiatives are going on, have gone on and they have been futile so far.

Q Right. Could you tell us, however, if Secretary Kissinger is involved in these negotiations?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly the State Department is, yes.

Q Can you say whether they involve the super-powers?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I don't think I can get into a guessing game like that.

Q I am not sure you answered Dick's question. You said the State Department is involved, but that did not answer the direct question of whether Secretary Kissinger was involved. Are you going to answer that?

MR. NESSEN: It all depends on what you mean, is he involved? Is he sending letters or making phone calls?

Q Is he personally involved in the initiative?

MR. NESSEN: Again, how do you mean, is he personally involved in the initiative?

Q In an active sense as opposed to a passive sense where he would be aware of it as opposed to participating in it?

MR. NESSEN: Are those the only two choices?

Q I am sorry. I don't know how to phrase it better.

MR. NESSEN: The United States is pursuing diplomatic initiatives that have been futile so far.

Q Do these initiatives involve the United States?

MR. NESSEN: They are American initiatives.

Q You give us the impression there is no daily talking back and forth between the President and Secretary of State.

MR. NESSEN: I certainly hope I did not leave that impression.

Q There is personal contact daily?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely.

Q Ron, to go back to your comment on Sunday when you were asked about the survival of President Thieu's government, and you did say you stand by that, and that is what you mean. You do not mean a non-Communist government? You mean President's Thieu's government?

MR. NESSEN: What I said Sunday, according to the pool report, "When asked if the President still thinks the Thieu government can survive, Nessen replied, 'As far as I know, 'u, and that is true. "Asked if the President believes President Thieu should remain in office, Nessen said, 'He is the elected head of the government. What has he to do with the Communist attacks.'"

So that is what I said Sunday and that is what I stand by.

Q Ron, I am a little confused on the diplomatic initiatives. Sometime before the invasion the United States sent out notes, I think, to the signatories and there was no response, I believe.

MR. NESSEN: There was an acknowledgment from Kurt Waldheim.

Q Has there been any diplomatic initiative in recent days, other than that?

MR. NESSEN: I would say they are going on.\*

Q They are going on?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they are.\*

Q To switch the subject, Ron, did the President play 18 holes of golf yesterday or 27?

MR. NESSEN: 18.

\*Mr. Nessen later clarified these statements. See attached statement by the Press Secretary.

Q Before we forget it, what is your plan on briefing tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Good point. Let's aim for 10:00 posting or briefing, depending on what the world looks like tomorrow.

Q Will you provide anything more today or will you give a lid or what?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, we have two disaster --

Q I mean other than that.

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you check at 5:00 and see if there is anything posted here at 5:00. If not, that would be a lid for the day.

John?

Q Ron, is Rod Hills principal duties to deal with the various investigations of Intelligence Agencies' activities?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Along that line, Ron, what is the reason for the extension of the statement of the Rockefeller Commission? Are they going to get more deeply into the domestic side?

MR. NESSEN: Governor Rockefeller has indicated it is going to take him more time than he anticipated to do the domestic part of the investigation and also, as you know, the President has concluded that the charter of the Commission is broad enough to include an investigation of some aspects of the allegations of assassinations.

Q Ron, I have a question on the Hills nomination. In light of the fact that this means that that couple will be taking in excess of \$100,000 a year from the Treasury and --

MR. NESSEN: But only a \$240 rebate.

Q It is a little unusual, I think, to have a husband and wife team in such high positions in the Administration. Can you give us a little background on who asked Mr. Hills to serve and why?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Aldo, but I can look into it for you.

Q Is there concern of a possible conflict of interest or possible charges of nepotism, seriously?

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MR. NESSEN: I think both of these people are highly respected in their own fields, and the fact they happen to be married to each other does not detract from their individual abilities.

Q But Congress has outlawed that sort of nepotism on the Hill, I believe, and that is the basis of that question.

MR. NESSEN: They are not working for each other.

Q Ron, did you talk to the President this morning about the dinner with Governor Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I have not.

Q When did they leave last night?

MR. NESSEN: We can check that for you.

Q Ron, has the President had any contact with former President Nixon or does he plan to while here?

MR. NESSEN: No, in response to both questions.

Q Did the President sign a Palm Springs compact with Governor Reagan last night? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, Peter.

Q Did you talk at all to the President about his discussions with Governor Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I did not.

Q Are you going to?

MR. NESSEN: I don't plan to.

Q Could we direct a question to you to have a report of the President's feeling about the meeting please.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

Q On the Lon Nol situation, does the President regard Lon Nol's departure from Phnom Penh to be for medical reasons or for political reasons?

MR. NESSEN: Governor Reagan left the house after dinner at 11:00.

I have no way of knowing, and it is not really something I think that needs to be addressed from here.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 11:00 A.M. PDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 3:55 P.M. PDT

APRIL 1, 1975

TUESDAY

(Palm Springs, California)

MR. NESSEN: You have the statement by the Press Secretary. In a nutshell, here is what happened.

I talked to the President this morning about various Vietnam matters, during the course of which he mentioned diplomatic efforts. In an effort to get details of those diplomatic efforts, I called a staff member at NSC and was misinformed and was led to believe that new and specific initiatives had been and were being undertaken.

In my briefing, when I was asked, "Has there been any diplomatic initiative in recent days on that?" -- meaning the letter of January 11. "I would say they are going on."

"They are going on?" "Yes, they are." That was in response to a question which contained the words "diplomatic initiative in recent days."

The President mentioned diplomatic efforts. I called NSC staff members to get the details. I was misled to believe there were new specific contacts being made. I talked to Dr. Kissinger this afternoon, and in the course of that conversation we talked about this subject, and he said he did not know of any new specific diplomatic initiatives.

He was continuing through normal diplomatic channels to urge other countries to try to persuade North Vietnam to live up to the accords.

I felt after that conversation with Dr. Kissinger that I ought to make sure that nobody took what I said this morning --

Q He would urge the other countries?

MR. NESSEN: He is urging the other countries.

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Q Did Dr. Kissinger bring this to your attention? Was he complaining?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was the other way around. I talked to him, just in the course of a phone conversation this afternoon, and asked for more details. That is when we discovered I had been misinformed.

Q Why do you think you were misled? What was the reason for NSC staff members misleading you?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, Lou, but I am going to find out.

Q These efforts are still going on, not the new ones, but these?

MR. NESSEN: Continuing, that is correct.

Q The ones from January.

MR. NESSEN: Since January 11.

Q Was Dr. Kissinger disturbed?

MR. NESSEN: Not nearly as disturbed as I was.

Q Was he mad, though?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if I gave him a chance to voice his opinion because I was strongly voicing mine.

Q We are contacting other nations?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q But in just a normal way?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Why don't we take new initiatives?

MR. NESSEN: There has been no response to the normal diplomatic contacts.

Q You did come out and say today there were new initiatives?

MR. NESSEN: I did see in the transcript in response to the question, "Have there been any diplomatic initiatives in recent days other than that?"-- referring to the January 11 letter. I said, "They are going on. Yes, they are." I did not want to leave the wrong impression.

Q According to Kissinger, they are going on?

MR. NESSEN: Through normal contacts we are urging other countries to try to persuade North Vietnam to live up, but I got the feeling that I left the impression -- and I was left with the impression by the NSC staff member -- that there have been some new things started from scratch.

Q Ron, some of us have reason to believe that Kissinger saw wire news dispatches and bulletins about new diplomatic initiatives and wondered about it and called you about it. That, I take it, is incorrect?

MR. NESSEN: That is incorrect. I called him.

Q What set you off to the fact that --

MR. NESSEN: I read the wire stories, too, but I called Dr. Kissinger.

Q You got no call from him. How did you know you were wrong?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I called Dr. Kissinger and we were talking about other things, and that came up in the conversation.

Q How did you know you were wrong, though, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: In the conversation with Dr. Kissinger.

Q You brought it up, though? Who brought it up?

MR. NESSEN: I brought it up.

Q How did you know you were wrong?

MR. NESSEN: I brought up the subject of negotiations and told him what I had said today.

Q So, you got the impression from Ford, and then you went to the NSC and that is when you got misinformed?

Q Why did you call Dr. Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: To talk about a number of things, Lou.

Q Can you tell us when he is coming out here now?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not scheduled yet.

Q Wednesday or Thursday, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. It has not been scheduled yet.

Honesty is the best policy.

Q You did say this morning you did not expect him before the press conference, which is Thursday, didn't you?

MR. NESSEN: I still don't.

Q Is there anything more on that meeting yesterday that Dr. Kissinger had with the Eastern establishment?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, here is what I am told, and I am not sure I believe anything I am told now. What I am told is -- and I did not discuss this with Dr. Kissinger -- that he has had these periodically ever since he became Secretary of State with this same group, a brainstorming session. Not everybody attends every meeting, but this is a group he has met with before.

Q How often, and why have we not known about it?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, that is a State Department matter. I have enough trouble keeping my own end up.

Q He has been Secretary of State one year and one half, and he has been up here for four years. Have these been going on that long?

MR. NESSEN: That is what I am told. Why isn't it possible to call the State Department?

Q Some of us have found out the meeting was a rarity, and that it would concern basically the Middle East and had nothing to do with Indochina, and I wonder if you can't find that out.

MR. NESSEN: I have been busy trying to get this thing nailed down.

Q You talked to the man who called the meeting.

MR. NESSEN: I was talking to him about this and some other things, and did not talk to him about that.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 4:00 P.M. PDT)