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NEWS CONFERENCE

#185

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12 NOON EDT

APRIL 8, 1975

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President worked all morning in his office with various advisers, primarily working on the speech for Thursday night on foreign policy.

A half hour from now, the President will be going out to the Rose Garden to speak briefly to a group of students from Grand Rapids and from Atlanta.

These students are brought to Washington for a program called CLOSE-UP, which through the year, brings the high school students and their teachers from various cities around the country to spend a week in Washington where they have seminars with Administration officials, Members of Congress, and so forth.

The students and their parents pay for the trip when they can, and for those students who can't afford it, private donations provide the expenses for the trip.

There will be open press coverage and the President will have some remarks to the group.

At 5:15 in the East Room, the President will be attending a reception for the National Alliance of Businessmen. He will have remarks there, which we are preparing in text form. About 1:30 or 2:00 we will have a text ready for that.

Primarily, the President is going to thank these businessmen, who some of you may know run a continuing program to provide jobs and training for disadvantaged adults, for Vietnam veterans and for former prisoners.

They have been running this program since 1968 and have provided 2 million jobs in that period for people in that category.

There will also be open press coverage for those who want to attend.

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The President and Mrs. Ford are going to go this evening to the Pearl Bailey concert at the Kennedy Center. It begins at 8 o'clock. This is one of the President's birthday presents to his wife. Today is her birthday.

A protective pool will be taken along, assembling here at 7:30. The President and Mrs. Ford will leave the White House at 7:50.

I think we have now handed out some announcements. One is that the President is designating Secretary Simon to be Chairman of the East-West Foreign Trade Board, and Bill Seidman to be Deputy Chairman.

This board was set up last month by executive order. It has nine members. The purpose of it is to establish rules and regulations necessary to carry out the Trade Act of 1974. It reviews possibilities for better East-West trade, including agricultural trade, the transfer of technology and it also reviews Export-Import Bank credits.

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We also are announcing the appointment today of Captain Leland S. Kollmorgen of the United States Navy to be the new Military Assistant to the President.

Captain Kollmorgen graduated from the Naval Academy in 1951. He was a 1960 graduate of the Naval Post-Graduate School in aeronautical engineering. He has a Masters of Science degree in foreign affairs from George Washington University.

I think we have passed out a biography of the Captain. If not, it will be ready by the end of the briefing.

We also are putting out today an Executive Order by the President concerning the use of chemical herbicides and riot control agents. As you know, the President in January signed the ratification of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which prohibits the use in war of lethal and incapacitating chemical and bacteriological weapons.

The United States view of that protocol is that it did not extend to riot control agents and chemical herbicides. However, the President wishes on his own to do this, as a matter of national policy, and so the result of the Executive Order today is that as a matter of national policy the United States has renounced the first use of herbicides in war, except to control the vegetation around American bases and immediately outside.

It has renounced the first use of riot control agents in war except in defensive military actions, to save lives in riot situations, and to reduce civilian casualties and on rescue missions.

Q Is that defoliation?

MR. NESSEN: The herbicides are defoliation.

Q So, we have been using it, and now we are abandoning it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know about the past, Helen. I am telling you that the Executive Order for the future renounces the use of these agents.

Q But in renouncing these as a matter of national policy, we are not acknowledging that this is a part of the Protocol of 1925 and, therefore, we are not bound by international law and this can be rescinded from that Executive Order, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the United States feels that the protocol does not extend to riot control agents and chemical herbicides, but as a matter of national policy, the President is renouncing their use except in these limited situations.

Q Ron, does that mean police will not get mace anymore?

MR. NESSEN: No, these have to do with war situations.

The President also, as part of this Executive Order, is affirming the policy that no chemical herbicides or riot control agents will be used in any circumstance without his specific approval.

Q Ron, do we furnish these agents to allies?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Marty.

Q Ron, under Section B he could still use it in Vietnam if he needed to for evacuation of Americans.

MR. NESSEN: The riot control agents?

Q What are these riot control agents?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know specifically what they are. I assume they refer to things like tear gas.

Q I didn't hear the question from Tom Jarriel.

Q The question was, under Section B he could still use riot control equipment or paraphernalia should he need to for the evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam, couldn't he?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Tom.

Q Ron, are you done with your announcements?

MR. NESSEN: No, I have one more.

The President is issuing a proclamation in which he is revising the method of young men registering for the draft. I believe you have that, too.

Q No, we don't.

MR. NESSEN: I will just explain it to you briefly while we are waiting for the paper to come out.

Under the current regulations, no young man is liable to register for the draft during a period within 60 days of his 18th birthday. It is felt that perhaps a more efficient way to do it would be to have one registration period of a few weeks, or perhaps a month every year during which all the young men who have their 18th birthdays that year would register during one period of the year.

The Selective Service System wants to move toward an experiment in that area, and in order to do so, the President must issue first this proclamation cancelling the old method and the Selective Service will soon come out with new regulations providing for a once-a-year registration system.

Q Ron, Senator Jackson has said that there is a secret agreement between the United States and Vietnam and called upon the President to make it public. Is there a secret agreement or agreements between the United States and Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I saw the Jackson story on the wire just before I came out here, and I simply did not have time to check it, but I will check it.

Q Will you give us a response to that today?

MR. NESSEN: As soon as I get one, yes.

Q Ron, when I asked previous to this trip how does the President feel that Israel could be more flexible, as mentioned in the Hearst interview, you sent me back to the transcript, and Bill Theis pointed out that he was there during the interview and the President never specified.

I was wondering if you could tell us, how does the President feel that Israel could be more flexible? If you don't know, would you ask the President?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly will ask.

Q Thank you.

Q Is there a date for putting out the Weyand report now, and has the President made up his mind on what has to be done in Southeast Asia, and when is there going to be an NSC meeting?

MR. NESSEN: One at a time, Helen.

On the Weyand report, I don't have anything to tell you on that today, other than what Dr. Kissinger indicated the other day.

Your second question was, has he what?

Q Made a decision.

MR. NESSEN: On what?

Q On the outcome.

MR. NESSEN: On Vietnam?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No. The President has the report from General Weyand, which he is studying. He also, as you know, this morning met all morning with advisers and will be meeting with his advisers for all of this week quite a lot of times.

Q Advisers to --

MR. NESSEN: Advisers to the President.

Q Specifically, is he talking about Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Most of them.

Q Most of them what?

MR. NESSEN: Most of his advisers.

What was your third question.

Q The NSC meeting.

MR. NESSEN: The NSC meeting, I would anticipate there would be one tomorrow.

Q Ron, General Weyand reported to the President on Saturday and it is now Tuesday of the week, and he still has not reported to the NSC, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, Bill.

Q Ron, today General Weyand and Mr. Habib are both on the Hill briefing Congressional committees. Are they empowered -- do they know what the President's policy will be about future aid to Vietnam and future policy toward Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q What are they saying? I mean, they are closed sessions.

MR. NESSEN: As far as Phil Habib goes, I believe that what he is doing is giving the history of diplomatic efforts in Indochina. As far as General Weyand goes, my understanding is that he is giving a factual report of what he saw in Vietnam.

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Q Ron, when you say the President is meeting with all, or most, of his advisers on these options, does that include Jack Marsh and others in the Office of Congressional Relations? Is he taking in the view of Congress in considering his options?

MR. NESSEN: I think, since the President is in the process of preparing his speech for Thursday night which will be a broad foreign policy speech dealing with all the major foreign policy issues, that it would be probably just as wise to wait and see what he has to say on Thursday.

Q Will he include the Vietnam aid request in the speech?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, he is considering the speech and his policy with his advisers, as well as the other foreign policy issues, in addition to Vietnam, and I think we will just wait until Thursday.

Q Ron, is there any contingency planning going on in the Administration for evacuating Vietnamese civilians beyond the children on a large-scale basis?

MR. NESSEN: I think Dr. Kissinger said the other day in Palm Springs that he was asked what options the President is considering, and I think he said that the issues involved aid, refugees, and a lot of other things involving Vietnam.

Q Is there any contingency planning going on for this mass evacuation now?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just leave it that the President is meeting with his advisers to consider his policies around the world, including Vietnam.

Q Could I follow up by one other question on that? Does the President favor providing aid to refugees in Viet Cong controlled areas?

MR. NESSEN: I think all these matters are being considered by the President. All the matters involving Vietnam are being considered by the President.

Q Ron, I think you said that the President was meeting with his advisers on foreign policy.

MR. NESSEN: Let me just straighten out that answer. I have not heard of any proposal to aid refugees in Viet Cong areas, and I don't want anybody to write a story saying the President is considering aid to refugees in Viet Cong areas. I say he is considering all the issues involved in Vietnam now. I have not heard that one specifically mentioned.

Q There have been several proposals of United Nations' aid to refugees in Viet Cong controlled areas. In fact, there already has been some, and the United States contributes to this. There is an additional request from the PRG, so I understand, to the United Nations, and the United Nations has made additional requests to the contributor countries, including the United States.

So, my question is, what is the President going to do about it?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will need to wait until Thursday night and find out.

Q Further, Ron, there is legislation on the Hill, Kennedy-Sparkman legislation, providing \$100 million for the U.N. to do exactly that, and Mansfield says that he is for giving aid on both sides of the war. There are very large proposals.

Q Ron, will we find out Thursday night what the President's policy is on Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: The point is, the President said that he does support humanitarian aid to Vietnam. Now, what the amount is and what the method of getting it there is, is something that he is considering.

Q Well, when he says Vietnam, is he talking about Viet Cong controlled areas in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I think concerning the methods and amounts and other matters about who it goes to, we will have to wait and see what he says Thursday.

Q Will we know this on Thursday night? Will he deal with this in his speech Thursday night?

MR. NESSEN: He will deal with Vietnam, among other foreign policy issues.

Q If I can get back to my question here, I think you indicated that the President had been talking to all of his advisers on foreign policy, Vietnam policy.

MR. NESSEN: The speech is a foreign policy speech. It is not a Vietnam speech.

Q All right. What kind of input would someone like Phil Buchen have on this, or yourself, on this particular subject?

MR. NESSEN: In the case of Phil, any matters that might involve advice from the Legal Counsel's office; in Marsh's case, Congressional relations and so forth.

Q Ron, has he talked to anybody outside the Administration who has expertise on Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: He is hearing a lot of opinions.

Q Ron, who is the chief architect of that Thursday night speech?

MR. NESSEN: The President.

Q Ron, I am sorry, but I would like to kind of pin you down on this. You said earlier that we will have to wait until Thursday night to get the answer to that question.

MR. NESSEN: Some of these questions.

Q Well, that is not what you said. The question was, whether he was in favor of furnishing U.S. aid directly to Viet Cong controlled area. Now, will we know this Thursday night?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will know some of the answers to your question on Vietnam Thursday night.

Q Will we know the answer to that specific question?

MR. NESSEN: The speech is not written yet, and the decisions are not made yet. So, it is not really possible for me to tell you.

Q Ron, has the President had any comment on President Thieu's mention of traitors?

MR. NESSEN: I think he was asked that in San Diego.

Q I am sorry, I missed it. Did he answer it?

MR. NESSEN: My memory is that he did.

Q He didn't.

MR. NESSEN: I say he did.

Q I think the thrust of the question on outside opinions was, has he consulted with, say, Rusk, McNamara, or any of the past architects; or Rostow? Has he had any personal contacts at all?

MR. NESSEN: Without talking about the specific names you mentioned, he is getting a lot of opinions.

Q From outside the White House?

Q Ron, is there some way in which the National Security Council meeting is taking a back seat here to these outside opinions? I ask that because Kissinger said on Saturday that it would be Tuesday and might slip to Wednesday. You now say you anticipate there will be a National Security Council meeting on Wednesday, all of which does not sound like a very urgent thing. Is there something that has changed there about assembling the National Security Council?

MR. NESSEN: No, I didn't mean to indicate that there was any doubt about an NSC Meeting. There will be an NSC meeting.

Q Before the President gives his foreign policy speech?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Ron, anybody that is inquiring about Vietnamese who work for the American government or American agencies are told that those who worked outside the government for American agencies will get the same priority as Vietnamese who worked for the American government, Embassy-type employees.

Given this, is the President looking into at all what happened in Nha Trang where the evacuation of our Consulate apparently meant leaving behind at gunpoint the Vietnamese and their families who had been encouraged to be there on the assumption they would be taken? Has the President asked for any explanation of that? Do we have any statement on that?

MR. NESSEN: The President is aware of the problem and it is under consideration.

Q In the same vein, when we have all these helicopters off the coast, why are we not dropping food and water, or why have we not been to these ships that are coming down the coast with refugees that take about five to ten days and that are landing with 50 to 100 dead?

MR. NESSEN: The proclamation concerning the registration procedures for the draft, I understand, was put out as we left for Palm Springs. That is why we don't have the paper now as it was passed out several days ago.

Steve, I really think, on the operation of that particular rescue operation you need to ask the Pentagon the question that you are asking here.

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Q Isn't it obvious that so far, our reaction -- we have talked a lot about the Vietnamese reaction time. Isn't it pretty obvious, so far, that our own reaction time up to this point, in view of the humanitarian situation, has been less than acceptable in the President's eyes?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has spoken on this deep commitment to humanitarian efforts there.

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Q Can we make a request on the Nha Trang embassy incident, find out what happened, who is to blame and if anything is being done about it?

MR. NESSEN: I said the question of the Vietnamese who want to leave is under consideration.

Q Ron, the coal miners who are honking outside, their signs say they want to kill both the Senate and the House versions of the strip mining law. Do you have the President's view on that?

MR. NESSEN: If I can bring you up to date on where it stands, it is in the conference committee to resolve the two issues, and the White House is working with the conferees to hopefully come up with an acceptable bill.

The President has some concern that because of the kinds of reductions in coal production that may be required under the bill, that consumer prices would go up sharply and, as you know, the President is opposed to anything that raises consumer prices. That is his main concern about the bill at the moment, but he does have people working with the conferees to draft a bill that he could sign.

Q Ron, you just said the President is opposed to anything that raises consumer prices. The President proposes decontrolling oil prices, which will certainly raise consumer prices, and there is an apparent contradiction there.

Are you sure you don't want to add anything to that?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the background on the decontrol of oil.

Q In other words, it is okay to raise the consumer prices there but not the coal?

MR. NESSEN: Was that a question? I didn't hear the question.

Q Is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the reasons for the decontrol proposal are to increase the production of oil here at home so the United States is not 40 percent dependent on foreign oil, as it is now, or 50 percent dependent, as it will be in two years, and totally at the mercy of foreign producers who can raise the prices, or cut off supplies at will.

Q Ron, most of the signs of the demonstrators who are interviewed out here are that they are concerned they are going to lose their jobs as a result of either of the bills. Is that a concern shared by the President, and is the concern so strong that he might veto legislation coming out of conference?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know what he said at the time he vetoed the surface mining bill last year. Part of his energy program is to convert to coal on a large scale. It does require increased production and, of course, that would provide jobs and maintain jobs, but since the bill is in conference right now, it is not possible to say what form it is going to come out in.

Q Ron, when the President gave his speech accompanying the signing of the tax cut bill a few days back and said he was drawing the line at \$60 billion on spending, he made a couple of exceptions. One was new energy programs, and the other -- I think the phrase was "urgent humanitarian needs."

Could you define what he meant by that?

MR. NESSEN: Does it require further definition?

Q You know, that could either refer to evacuating refugees in Vietnam or unemployment benefits being raised or any of a number of things.

MR. NESSEN: He didn't restrict it to any particular definition.

Q Would improved unemployment benefits and programs for the jobless fall under that authority?

MR. NESSEN: He has already asked for extended unemployment benefits. He did the other day in San Francisco.

Q What about this \$6 billion public works and public service jobs bill that is on the Hill now?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have already talked about \$2 billion that he has already asked for previously. The other \$4 billion he does not think would accomplish what the authors say it would accomplish.

Q I guess what I am getting at, Ron, is when the President says he will veto new spending programs other than in those two categories, would the public service jobs bill be exempted because there are humanitarian --

MR. NESSEN: I think that bill would be considered on its merits.

Q Ron, is there anything new from here today on a possible NATO heads of government meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Would there be in the President's speech, possibly?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to cover the entire foreign policy picture. I don't know that he will announce any overseas trips.

Q Ron, Newsweek says that Max Fisher has gone to Israel as sort of an official, or unofficial, emissary for the President. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: I understand he is in the Middle East.

Q Is he at the behest of the President?

MR. NESSEN: I know he is in the Middle East, and I think I would rather check on why he is in the Middle East. I did not check this morning. I meant to. I anticipated the question, and I forgot to get the answer.

Q And you will update us on the reassessment of the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: Only that it is not completed yet, that it is anticipated to take a number of weeks. It is not done yet.

Q Can you tell us what you mean by number of weeks?

MR. NESSEN: I would say between four and six weeks from the time it is started.

Q Ron, the Cambodians apparently found somebody to talk to on the other side in Thailand the other day. Does the United States have any details on those talks? Can you tell us who they talked to? Is the United States aware of what was discussed?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to get the details of the talks from the Cambodians. The United States has always favored negotiated settlement to the war.

Q I am asking if the United States was a party to these talks.

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Mr. Nessen, the State Department said yesterday that the White House was considering sending a special representative to attend Chiang Kai-Shek's funeral. I wonder if you have anything on that?

MR. NESSEN: The funeral is not until the 16th of April, and I don't have the delegation to announce. There will be a delegation going.

Q Ron, has the White House taken any position on criminal charges being brought against companies involved in overcharges for petroleum, propane, things like that? The reason I ask this is that a lot of stuff has come out of FEA the last week on this.

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to ask the FEA about that.

Q So, the White House has no position on it?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, was the President satisfied with Mr. Kelley's report on the break-in in the Alexandria apartment by the FBI, or has he ordered any further investigation of that?

MR. NESSEN: Has the President seen the Kelley report?

Q Has he?

MR. NESSEN: Is there a Kelley report?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that the President has seen it. I am not aware whether the President has seen it.

Q I would like to say thank you, but we also would like to have that Jackson thing because it is very important.

MR. NESSEN: It is going to take a little time.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:32 P.M. EDT)