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NEWS CONFERENCE

#239

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:05 P.M. EDT

JUNE 6, 1975

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President came into the office at 7:35 this morning, and he had his usual meetings in the early part of the morning with staff members. He did have the bipartisan Congressional leaders in, and I think you have heard from Senator Byrd and Congressman Rhodes about that meeting.

Then, at 11:30, I think, some of you went in and saw the presentation of the Rockefeller Commission Report to the President. Right now, the President is having one of his regular meetings with the Vice President.

This afternoon, the President is going to have more staff meetings, and at 5:15, he will stop in at a reception for new noncareer government executives. This will be in the East Garden. There won't be any speech or anything by the President. And frankly, I don't have a guest list at the moment, but this will be some of the new Presidential appointees, who the President has not had a chance to talk to personally since they joined the Administration.

Q Coverage on that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No, it will just be a private social event in the garden.

Now, tomorrow, at 10:00 -- I think we mentioned to you the meeting with the Governors to discuss the railroad reorganization. It begins at 10:00.

I would guess, if there is interest, we could have pictures taken at the beginning of that and then some kind of report from the participants after the meeting.

As far as the weekend goes, other than that meeting tomorrow, I don't have anything. I don't, at the moment, see any trip to Camp David.

Q All?

MR. NESSEN: Possible.

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Let's see. We have either passed out, or we already have, a number of announcements, including the nomination by the President of Richard Roberts to be Assistant Administrator of the Energy Research and Development Administration; the nomination by the President of Robert L. Martin to be a Commissioner of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission; the nomination by the President of Stanley Legro to be an Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Also, the President is sending letters to the Speaker and the President of the Senate concerning the authorization of U. S. participation in the OECD financial support fund, the establishment of a special working group on textile trade policy -- you have a memo on that -- and a declaration of the State of Louisiana as a major disaster area.

Q Ron, do you have salaries on Martin and Legro?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have them here. I guess we could dig them out for you. You should have all of those announcements now. We will check the salaries.

\$38,000.

Q Both cases?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

I don't have any other announcements today.

Q What about the Rockefeller report?

Q When will it be released?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President will read the report, and that may be one of the things he does over the weekend. I suspect he will and then will make a decision on the release, on whether to release it.

Q Ron, just because you had to remove the section from the report, the printed report dealing with assassination plots by the CIA --

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea -- the White House has no idea what has transpired up to this point in the Rockefeller Commission deliberations. I read the statement they put out last night. They indicated they had not had time to complete a thorough investigation of assassination allegations and that they would simply forward the material to the President.

Q Did the President have anything to do with the decision not to include the assassinations?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he did not.

Q Did anybody in the White House have anything to do with the decision?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, they did not.

Q Didn't the preprinted report have a section dealing with CIA? Didn't the actual report itself have a section dealing with the CIA involvement in the assassination plot?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the vaguest notion.

Q Ron, wasn't there some staff liaison with the Commission during this proceeding?

MR. NESSEN: There was, John.

Q Well, was that staff liaison all that ineffective?

MR. NESSEN: All of that was what?

Q Don't you know something about what went on?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that, there was no written section in the report relating to allegations of assassination. That is my understanding.

Q The material was given separately on the assassination?

MR. NESSEN: It either was today or will be. That is right.

Q Ron, are you suggesting that it is an open question as to whether this report will be made public or not? I thought we had been led to believe it would be made public.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know what you have been led to believe, Peter. The President will read it and then decide whether to make it public.

Q So, he has not yet decided whether to make it public?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Could I clarify something you just said, and that was that, he will either -- he has either gotten it or will get it? Is he getting two reports from Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is getting a report from the Rockefeller Commission. I think some of you saw him get it today. Then, the materials that the --

Q UPI said Rockefeller this morning said there will be something else going up later today. Is that going to be an oral report on the assassination?

MR. NESSEN: No. The materials gathered by the Commission on allegations of assassinations will be turned over to the President.

Q What is he going to do with it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to read that, too.

Q Do you think he is just going to give him a big fat file, like this, and say, "It is yours, Jerry, read it?"

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q There is no analysis of it at all?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea. These are all matters that, until a half and hour ago, were in the hands of the Rockefeller Commission.

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Q But they say you took it over over here at the White House. They are not permitted to address it now. This is the same staff. Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Dillon had indicated to us very firmly that the section on CIA assassinations had been completed and would be included in the report and that the report would be released today for publication on Sunday.

Now there has been a big change in that original plan and according to Mr. Rockefeller's aides it was up to the White House.

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I say, I am not familiar with what has transpired before today, and it was not at the White House before today. If I read the statement that was put out by the Rockefeller Commission last night it said that -- it says they began the inquiry into allegations of assassinations and there has not been time permitted for a full investigation. The materials in the possession of the Commission which bear on these allegations will be turned over to the President.

Q Is there going to be an investigation by the White House, or by anyone designated by the White House, of the assassination attempts, or is it just now going to be left in its raw form?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that the President will read the material sent to him by the Commission on the alleged assassinations and will take whatever action he deems appropriate after having read them. The materials also will be turned over to the Church Committee in accordance with the procedures followed on other material.

Q Ron, could I return to what Peter was asking about before? I have distinct impression that when this Commission was being set up the purpose, as described by the President and you and everyone else who speaks in quotations of the White House, was that it was supposed to clear the air about the accusations of domestic spying by the CIA.

Could you give us a hypothetical explanation of how it would be possible to clear the air as a result of this investigation, if you don't make it public?

MR. NESSEN: You say if it is not made public, Adam, but, as I say, the President will read it and then decide.

Q Well, that entertains the possibility he will decide now, doesn't it?

MR. NESSEN: I think we ought to wait until he has had a chance to read it and make his decision.

Q Ron, did I understand you to say a decision has been made to turn over all these materials to the Church Committee?

MR. NESSEN: The materials relating to the assassination allegations?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: They will be turned over to the Church Committee under the procedures that have been followed on other material.

Q What does that mean? Does that mean all of the material on the assassinations will be turned over?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever the procedure is that has been followed on the other stuff, and, as I understand it, the Church Committee is quite happy with the procedures and have had no complaints.

Q Does it have to go through a Buchen review?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely what the procedures are, Mort. You may know more than I do on that. You have been following it.

Q Where did you get that understanding about the happiness of the Church Committee?

MR. NESSEN: From what I read in the papers; what I have heard.

Q Senator Church said this morning that President Truman, whom Mr. Ford so often pays tribute to, had a sign that said "the buck stops here." But, "In this matter," he said, "it is apparently that the Ford Administration view is that the buck gets passed to the Congressional committee."

Does the President have any reaction to that?

MR. NESSEN: If I read the quotation correctly, he was referring to, as I understand it, the inability of the Rockefeller Commission to complete its work on allegations of assassinations. He was speaking specifically ---

Q That was not my impression.

Q Is this coming out this weekend? Is it going to be available for Sunday papers or not?

MR. NESSEN: I would say not.

Q Ron, this seems to be a matter of some importance. Could you explain to us why the Rockefeller Commission found itself unable to complete an investigation in a so serious and important matter?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to ask them that, Peter.

Q It is a Presidential commission appointed to inquire into the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I read their statement last night it says that time has not permitted a full investigation.

Q Ron, why would time not permit a full investigation?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I think you need to address that to those people.

Q Ron, they are addressing all questions to the White House. They say they cannot respond to any questions along these lines.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, the fact of the matter is that until a half-hour ago the report was in the hands of the Commission and they have the full knowledge of what their policies and procedures and time requirements were, and I think their statement says clearly they did not have time to finish the investigation.

Q I am not referring to that, Ron. I am referring to the fact the Rockefeller Commission refers all questions along these lines to the White House.

MR. NESSEN: As far as the status of the report of the Rockefeller Commission to the President, it is indeed in the hands of the President and I will be happy to answer whatever questions I can about the next steps as they relate to the Rockefeller Commission report.

As to what has gone in the months and weeks leading up to this, I have no knowledge of what the Rockefeller Commission has been doing.

Q Ron, do you know the President was not consulted on the matter of deletion of the assassination material? Do you know he was not?

MR. NESSEN: I said a moment ago my understanding was there was -- why tell you what my understanding was when the Rockefeller Commission people know precisely what the facts were and I don't?

Q Ron, is it true that the White House has rejected the Rockefeller report and ordered them to rewrite it and destroy hundreds of copies that were preprinted for distribution today?

MR. NESSEN: Untrue.

Q Ron, hasn't Mr. Buchen seen the report -- some days ago?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that the one and only copy in existence of the full report is in the hands of the President.

Q Wasn't there a previous version a few days ago?

MR. NESSEN: I understand he has not seen any of the versions until today.

Q Didn't the White House specifically ask the Rockefeller Commission to look into assassination attempts?

MR. NESSEN: I think, if you recall the train of events at the time, the President did find it was within the Charter of the Rockefeller Commission to look into the allegations of assassinations, especially into those areas that --

Q Did the President ever consider --

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish my answer, Dave.

-- especially in those areas that had any connection with possible domestic activity.

Q Ron, did the President ever consider extending the life of the Commission so they could complete the assassination study?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it was extended once, as I understand it.

Q Did he consider a further extension?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Was he asked?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Do, as far as you know, the Commission never asked for more time to complete its study?

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I know.

Q Would he have been willing to grant more time for that purpose?

MR. NESSEN: I am told, this morning, the Commission has disbanded.

Q Ron, I still don't quite understand. Does the President want a report on assassination attempts, or does he not?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, he has the material of what the Rockefeller Commission could accomplish within the time it had, and he will read that. And then, he will decide what further action, if any, he deems appropriate.

Q In other words, he might ask for a report on assassination attempts at a later time after he has read the raw data?

MR. NESSEN: He will take whatever action he deems appropriate.

Q Ron, the President isn't in a position to read all this raw data, is he?

I mean, how much time is that going to take? Is he setting up any machinery for the evaluation of this, a mini-committee, or something, to report to him?

MR. NESSEN: No, he plans to read it.

Q Himself?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q How long will it take? Do you have any idea?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Ron, is there dissatisfaction at the White House on the way this report was handled?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, are you suggesting that the first knowledge the President had of anything in this report was when he received it today?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q Well, Ron, you said, a minute ago, in answer to a question of mine, that there was liaison between the White House staff and the Commission. What does that liaison consist of?

MR. NESSEN: I just have not been that close to it, John.

Q Ron, didn't the Vice President give him some interim reports on how things were going and how they were coming to grips with the various aspects?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Bill was wondering whether the Vice President had given the President any interim reports of how this was going, and I am not aware of any.

Q Wasn't the March extension given specially for the purpose of investigating an assassination plot?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think it was the Commission found itself unable to complete its primary mission.

Q Who is the liaison?

MR. NESSEN: Phil Buchen was the primary liaison.

Q Ron, could I check something and see if it is correct? Did you say that the one and only copy of the Rockefeller report is in the hands of the President?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, it is. It is not even a copy. It is a bound page proof.

Q Page proof of something printed?

MR. NESSEN: Page proof of something that may be printed.

Q That means it is typed?

MR. NESSEN: It is not handwritten.

Q It is not typed; it is printed?

MR. NESSEN: It is a page proof of --

Q That means there are more copies somewhere?

MR. NESSEN: If there are, they are not distributed around.

Q A previous question had made the statement that there were several hundred preprinted copies of the Rockefeller report. Are you saying that is incorrect; there were not several hundred preprinted copies, or were there?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I have no way of knowing what the Rockefeller Commission's printing schedule is.

Q You said the only copy is in the President's hands.

MR. NESSEN: The only copy I am aware of is in the President's hands.

Q Well, Ron, what was that Mr. Rockefeller was holding up at his little press conference last Monday?

MR. NESSEN: Somebody told me that was typewritten pages, I think.

Q He said it was a typewritten copy of the report going into its final version.

MR. NESSEN: Somebody asked me, at the White House, how many people have copies of the Rockefeller report. My answer was, as far as I am aware, there is only one copy of the Rockefeller Commission Report in the White House, and that is the one the President has.

Q Ron, earlier this week, we were told by the Rockefeller Commission that the report was complete, including the section on CIA assassination plots. The Vice President already described violations by the CIA as minor. A couple days later Church says it is not minor, very serious, murder, and the report was scheduled to be released today for publication on Sunday. Now, suddenly, there is no report. There is no section on the CIA assassination plot, and there is a big question of whether this report will ever be made public.

Now, are you leveling with us on what the White House has done as far as the Rockefeller Commission Report is concerned?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why was this given out to the television media? Last week, on television, I heard all this about the assassination. Who leaked it, if they did not want it to get out before the report was given to the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the vaguest notion, Naomi.

Q Ron, does the President still feel that the purpose of the investigation in the Rockefeller Commission Report is ultimately to report to the people to settle the questions, and does he still feel that this should be released to the American people in principle?

MR. NESSEN: I think he would like an opportunity to read it and then make his decision.

Q Ron, do you deny that the White House intervened in any way to block publication or to delete material?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as far as blocking publication, as far as I am aware, at the White House, the plan has always been for the President to have an opportunity to read it.

Would you get that letter out of my files?

Q Do you deny any White House intervention in deleting, blocking, or in any way restricting what the Committee had in mind in terms of release?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q You deny that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't quite know what I am denying, but I think this letter -- if you wait just a moment -- I think this letter will help to clear up some of what I sense is the thrust of your question.

As far as the White House has been concerned, the question of releasing the report always has depended on having the President read it first and make the decision.

Q To wit, then, the question has always centered on what are the contents of the report. Based on the contents, the decision will be made on whether to make it public or not. Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President ought to have an opportunity to determine whether, for instance, the report has any classified information in it that would need to be handled in the normal manner that classified information is handled.

Q Is he an expert on classified information?

MR. NESSEN: He has folks who are.

Q Ron, are you under the impression the Commission prepared this report only for the President's eyes, or for public consumption?

MR. NESSEN: I guess you will have to ask the Commission.

Q Ron, personally I cannot understand how this thing could be going on all these months, and you seem to stand there and suggest you have no idea what the Commission has been doing all this time and that nobody over here did, either.

MR. NESSEN: That is basically correct.

Q Ron, a question: One thing you have just said contradicts ---

MR. NESSEN: Let me clear up Steve's point, and I think Steve raises a point that a number of others of you may have some confusion about. I received a letter from Peter Clapper on May 22nd.

Q Who is Peter Clapper?

MR. NESSEN: He is the Director of Public Affairs for the Rockefeller Commission. May 22nd was what, two or three weeks ago? He said, "As I understand it, your present thinking is that if the President decides to release the report the Commission would schedule and handle the advance press briefing --" and so forth. That was three weeks ago. Now, what understanding they may have given you in the meantime, I don't know.

Q What is the date on that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The letter from Clapper to me was May 22nd.

Q Was that the full text of the letter?

MR. NESSEN: That is the key part of it.

Q Ron, a number of our questions are predicated on the original charter of the Commission which, as I remember it -- I don't have it in front of me now and I have not looked at it recently -- was that they were to report to the people as well as the President. Am I incorrect on that?

MR. NESSEN: I just think you are getting a little ahead of the game, until the President has had an opportunity to read the report and make his decision.

Q You didn't answer the question. Am I incorrect? Was that the original intent of the Commission?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall what the charter of the Commission said in terms of making a report.

Q Ron, you repeatedly refer us to the Rockefeller Commission for answers to our questions. Could you give us a name or a telephone number, or could you produce that person now to answer the questions?

MR. NESSEN: They do have a Director of Public Affairs named Peter Clapper, and I don't have his phone number on this letter but I am sure it is easy to obtain.

Q But he is under direction to refer all questions to the White House.

MR. NESSEN: Just a minute now. Some of your questions relate to how the Rockefeller Commission conducted itself during the months that it has been holding its hearings and preparing its report. That is something I don't and other people at the White House don't have knowledge of. Any aspects of this report as of 11:30, or whatever time the President got it, I will be happy to answer to the best of my knowledge.

Q Ron, yesterday at 9:30, I guess it was, yesterday morning, Pete Clapper told a reporter in our office to expect to pick up the report at about 2:45 this afternoon. That was Pete Clapper talking. What happened in the ensuing 30 hours?

MR. NESSEN: What happened in the ensuing three weeks since he wrote to me and said, "As I understand it, your present thinking is if the President decides to release the report" -- and so on and so on.

Q Would you read the whole letter?

MR. NESSEN: He says it was good to see me again. And he appreciates my interest in the questions relating to the possible release of the Commission's report. Then he goes through the conversation we had the day before, saying it is his understanding that if the President decides to release the report the Commission would schedule and handle the press briefing.

"I assume the Commission would be responsible for drafting the press release and my office would assist in its reproduction and provide the backup that is called for. The briefing might be on a Thursday, with a hold for release for Sunday A.M. to provide adequate reading time while minimizing leak time."

Then it mentions who might participate in the briefing and that it might be held in Room 450 of EOB, and that paperback companies would be given a copy so that they could run off paperback books of it, and that I had raised no problem about the President and Mr. Bellon appearing on "Meet The Press" and "Face The Nation" should they be inclined to do so following release of the report.

Q How could he be under such a monstrous misconception that the report was going to be made public?

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish, in response to Mort's question, reading the letter.

And then he said he understands my feeling that there ought to be some copies here at the White House for people to read and "we plan to have the GPO print 3,000 copies as soon as the President notifies the Commission that he approves its release."

This is the last paragraph of the letter which I did not read previously. He said, "As I mentioned, we plan to have the GPO print 3,000 copies of the report as soon as the President notifies the Commission that he approves its release. These will satisfy the immediate press and Government needs. Obviously, the press briefing would have to be scheduled for a date by which those copies would be available.

"Thanks again for your help. Sincerely, Peter R. Clapper."

Q How did you respond to that letter, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't respond. It is a memo following a meeting with him.

Q So you knew it was set up to be made public, right?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see anywhere in the letter, Helen, where it says it is scheduled to be made public.

Q Ron, two days ago, on Wednesday afternoon, the Vice President said in response to reporters' questions, "You will find out Sunday," as reporters pursued points with him.

MR. NESSEN: Gang, you know we can go over this again and again but the central points to keep in mind, or one, the White House has always gone on the assumption that the President would have an opportunity to read the report and then make his decision as to its release.

Q Ron ---

MR. NESSEN: Mort, let me finish, may I?

Number one, the White House has always gone on the assumption the President would have an opportunity to read the report before he decided whether to release it or not. A letter to me dated May 22nd from the Public Affairs Director of the Commission indicates that that was his understanding, too.

Now, whatever may have been said elsewhere in the ensuing days, I have no responsibility or knowledge of.

Q How about, you said yourself ---

MR. NESSEN: Adam, may I? I have told you what the White House position is. This letter appears to indicate what the Commission's understanding was. Now we can talk about this all day, but I don't see how I can go beyond those two points which are clearly on the record.

Q Ron, were you not told two days ago in a conversation with a White House official at West Point that it was the White House's intention to go along with the release of this report this weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I think the discussion at West Point had to do with if it was decided to release the report would we be able to release it in time for Sunday's papers.

Q Ron, did you not tell me, among other other reporters, that you were considering putting the thing out on Friday for Sunday release, and if you did, in fact, say that, as I remember you said it, how on earth did you think the President was going to get it read between sometime Friday morning and whenever you put it out Friday afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: Again, my understanding of that conversation was -- it was based on the premise that the President, if he approved the release of it, could we get it out.

Q You never said anything like that.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it was certainly always in my mind, as you see from this.

Q No, I don't see it a bit. I think you are a liar.

Q Ron, that letter that you read to us -- I don't know whether you know it or not, but that indicates to me this report is already set up in type at the GPO and ready to roll.

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing. That is something you have to ask the Commission.

Q And the President got a page-by-page proof?

Q Ron, you are dealing with this situation as though this is a foreign government that is responsible for this confusion. This is the Vice President. He is, presumably, in the same Administration, going down the same track. There has been constant communication between the White House and that Commission.

Why can we not assume, from these events and these snarled communications, that there is something you don't want out?

MR. NESSEN: Something I don't want out in terms of what is in the report?

Q Right.

MR. NESSEN: First of all, I have not read a single page of the report.

Q I mean, "you," the White House.

MR. NESSEN: And as I say, the President got the report -- what -- 45 minutes ago and has likewise not read the report.

Q Are you insisting nobody in the White House knows the contents of that report? You are not telling us that?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is, no one in the White House, that I know of, has read the entire 300 and some pages of the report.

Q Ron, is it possible that there was a change of mind? One thing that would fit this whole scenario is that, while nobody has read the whole report, at some point, the White House and/or the President got a readout on what the report contained, and at that point, there was a change of mind from a general acceptance of the idea of releasing it to a general acceptance of the idea we had better wait until we look at this more closely. Did that happen?

MR. NESSEN: Since, as far as I know, there has never been a change of mind, I don't see how I can address your question.

Q There has never been a change of mind that you are aware of?

MR. NESSEN: As far as release of the report goes?

Q In other words, how did all these people get the signal that the White House was tending towards a release, and the letter you referred to seems to confirm that?

MR. NESSEN: Do you know that the White House is tending against the release, Steve?

Q But they are not tending toward release Sunday; you said that.

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not.

First of all, I am not clear as to what it is we are talking about here. It seems to me one thing we are talking about is that a lot of --

Q We are talking about a cover-up, Ron, a possible cover-up. That is what we are talking about.

MR. NESSEN: I wonder if you could point out to me, Mary, the cover-up that you see?

Q Well, this affair has been in the making for six months. You are pretending, as Phil said, it happened in a foreign country -- no communication -- these strange people who are working on a subject about which you know nothing.

For at least a week, we have been told we are going to get a report to the public, which is usually what Presidential commissions do. Now you say, "Well that was never certain."

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not saying it was never certain, Mary. I am saying it was never the White House plan to automatically make it public until the President had a chance to read it.

Q Then, why didn't you give it to him ahead of time, if it is so long, so that you could give it to us today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't run the Commission, Mary.

Q You don't run it, except, you refer us to them, and they refer us to you.

MR. NESSEN: What is the cover-up, though, that you see?

Q The cover-up, Ron --

MR. NESSEN: I want Mary to tell me what the cover-up is.

Q The cover-up is, why you won't let us see what is in that report, which was a report for the people.

MR. NESSEN: How do you know you are not going to see what is in this report?

Q Well, why don't you tell me that you are.

MR. NESSEN: I am going to tell you what the President decides, after he decides it.

Q Ron, the aspect of the cover-up is that, the Vice President, Rockefeller, already indicated to us that the CIA was only guilty of minor infractions, after a five-month investigation. Two days later, we have the Chairman of the Senate Investigation Committee saying it is a lot more than a minor infraction -- there are murder plots involved in here.

Now, I am under the impression that Vice President Rockefeller was about to cover-up CIA wrongdoing and the White House balked at it as soon as they saw Church had some hard evidence of very serious wrongdoing. That is where I think there is a cover-up.

Will you respond to that?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear the question.

Q The question is, did the White House reject the Rockefeller Commission Report after charges by Senator Church that there was hard evidence of very serious offenses by the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is the same question you asked before, Pat, and my answer before was, "No." And it still is no.

Q Ron, could you answer this: did the President ever tell a group of reporters that he was worried that the CIA investigation would uncover evidence which would defame the reputations of four of his predecessors, and could that possibly be the worry that is involved in all this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what --

Q Were you there at the time?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by a worry involved in this. To me the matter is much simpler, I think, than it is being made here. The matter is that the President wants to read the report before he makes his decision.

Q You did not answer my question.

Were you present at a time when the President stated to a group of reporters that he was afraid that an investigation of the CIA would defame the reputation of four of his predecessors?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that conversation.

Q Ron, did the President participate in the conclusion that the Commission had not had time to conclude an adequate investigation of the allegations of assassination? Did he participate in that conclusion?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he did.

Q Ron, can you think of any reason for the President not to make that report public, other than the presence of classified material?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just let him read the report and then make his decision and not speculate.

Q Could I ask a question?

MR. NESSEN: Judy.

Q I would like to ask you -- you keep referring to this letter. In fact, you read almost the entire letter. The letter seems to be an answer to you; that seems to me that is where the change came. That, maybe, perhaps, at that time, did you carry the message of the White House, that they did not want this report released?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q It said, "I agree with you --"

MR. NESSEN: He came in and talked to me the day before to go over what their plans were, and mostly, I listened.

Q What was that sentence -- "I agree with you --" or "We agreed that it should wait upon the President?" I believe there was a line there that said "I agree with you."

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I really offered no suggestions or ideas at the meeting. Pete came into tell me what their plans were and then went back and wrote, what, I guess, most of you know as a memo of understanding, and he said, "It was good to see you again. I appreciate your interest in questions relating to the possible release."

Q What were the questions?

Q "I agree --" what then?

MR. NESSEN: "As I understand it, your present thinking is that, if the President decides to release the report --" and so on.

Q That is what I mean. It sounds like you had quite a bit of input --

MR. NESSEN: No, I listened.

Q -- of the White House position.

MR. NESSEN: I listened.

Q Did you tell Pete Clapper, yesterday, that the decision on the release and the mechanics of the release of the report would be up to the Commission?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't talk to Pete Clapper yesterday.

Q That letter says, "After the President decides to releast the report." Is there a possibility that he may decide not to release it?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will let him read it and decide.

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Q Ron, the whole thrust of our questions to you is that up until today we have been led to believe that this report would be issued to us today for release on Sunday. Now you are not only changing that, but you are also refusing to commit yourself to an eventual release. I don't think you would have us all on your neck this way if you would say, "You will get it sometime next week," but you are refusing to make that commitment and we want to know why suddenly you are refusing to make that commitment. You are changing your commitment because before it was clearly going to become public and now you are refusing to say that.

MR. NESSEN: When did the White House make the commitment to release the report?

Q The Rockefeller Commission has been making that commitment.

MR. NESSEN: Ah, ah. Well, when did the White House make that commitment?

Q You have nothing to do with it, right? You are talking about a foreign country. He is only Vice President. If something happens he will be President and you won't have a job any more.

MR. NESSEN: I should be so lucky.

(Laughter.)

Q Ron, why does the President have so little trust in Vice President Rockefeller's discretion? I mean, if there was classified material in this report, doesn't he depend on Mr. Rockefeller, who he appointed to this Commission, to be discreet enough to withhold it?

MR. NESSEN: After all, the report is a report to the President and it is a Presidential Commission. And I am sure ---

Q Headed by Vice President Rockefeller.

Now, doesn't he depend on the Vice President to exercise discretion, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure you would not want the Vice President or the Commission to pull its punches or withhold anything from the President, would you, Les?

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Doesn't anybody have any questions about any of the other major subjects in the news today?

Q Yes, I do. What was the President's reaction to only, I think, 16 of the Republican Senators being willing to endorse the President's candidacy, his running for President?

MR. NESSEN: I think what I will do, Les, is to take that as a more general question about the letter and not accept the characterization that you put on it, but in terms of the letter ---

Q What characterization did he put on it?

MR. NESSEN: That only 16 had signed it.

Q That is not a characterization. That is a fact.

Q For various reasons they did not endorse it, Ron, for all kinds of reasons, but what was his reaction to their not endorsing it?

MR. NESSEN: The President's reaction to the letter was that he deeply appreciates and is very grateful for the letter and the support that it shows from those Members at such an early date before the campaign, and he appreciates very much the fact that those Members are willing to put their names on a letter of endorsement at this early stage in the campaign, and he is encouraged by that showing at this stage.

Q Ron, on another subject, the President is reported by the pool as having told the Vice President at his meeting a short while ago that he hoped the end result of this report would be that the American people would give their support to the CIA and the intelligence community. How are they going to have an opportunity to do that?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will just wait and see what the President decides to do about releasing the report.

Q Ron, in connection with the letter that you read, it rested on a decision to be made by the President as to the release.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The Rockefeller Commission was operating under the assumption that the letter would be released, which suggests that somewhere between May 22nd and now there was a decision about the manner and the style of releasing this publication.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see that, Mort. As I say, the assumption from the very beginning has been that the President would read it and then decide, and where the so-called commitment to release it came from in the White House, I am not aware. I would like to hear who in the White House made the commitment. I am not aware of it.

Q Ron, would you give us some indication as to how -- there is a decision on timing here, obviously. The President receives a 300-some page report. He cannot read it in 20 minutes or two hours and have an afternoon briefing on a Friday. Now somehow it was decided that the President would receive the report on Friday and read it over the weekend. Can you tell us how that decision was arrived at?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will have to check with the Rockefeller Commission. I think it had something to do with when they finished their work.

Q Ron, shouldn't we check with Mr. Buchen on that, and couldn't you produce him to answer these questions?

MR. NESSEN: I will certainly ask Phil, but I don't know that he has -- as I say, what went on before this morning went on in the Rockefeller Commission and you would need to ask them the question.

Q He was liaison.

Q They had coordination with Mr. Buchen, didn't they?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell Phil of your interest and see if we can produce him.

Q Ron, earlier in the week, didn't you in fact assume that release would be automatic and agree to leave the mechanics of that release up to the Rockefeller staff?

MR. NESSEN: I would not say that my conversation and letter from Pete Clapper would indicate that.

Q Ron, is this a case where whatever original plans you had for releasing were sort of overtaken by events; namely, the disclosures through the Church Committee, and this necessitated more time for you to decide what to do?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, has there been a terrible misunderstanding? Usually we get a terrible misunderstanding when things develop like that. You give us an impression everything is right on schedule, no change in plans. Everything is moving right along. Is that the case? There has been no misunderstanding?

MR. NESSEN: Apparently, some of you have had the understanding that it was going to be released on Sunday. I never did have that understanding.

Q Ron, you told some of us yesterday you could offer guidance today as to when the report would likely be released. Can you do that for us?

MR. NESSEN: If the President decides to release it?

Q That is correct.

Q Did you make that plain at the time ---

Q Can you answer the question?

MR. NESSEN: Nobody ever asked me at the time whether the report was going to be released?

Q If it is released, when, roughly, do you think we will get it?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just wait for the President to decide whether to release it or not.

Q Ron, I want to ask you one other thing. There has been some mumbo jumbo here about classified information. Somebody here correct me if I am wrong, but I thought a couple of weeks ago we were told that the Rockefeller Commission had been instructed to draft this report so that specifically classified information would not leak into it and it would be able to be released to the public. I thought that was their decision.

MR. NESSEN: I was asked a hypothetical question of what considerations there might be that would persuade the President not to release it. I said among them might be a question of whether there was any classified information in it. I have not seen the report yet. I have no idea whether it is all unclassified, or classified, or what.

Q What other considerations might there be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I think you will have a Presidential decision one way or the other soon.

Q Is he reading all afternoon, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has got some other things as well as the reading, Mary.

Q Does the President have any concern, do you know, whether the public would really have the kind of confidence that he said he hoped it would have in the CIA and in the intelligence community if he in fact kept this report underwraps?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather wait until he decides, Dick.

Q Ron, before this winds up, I have one question on another topic. There have been reports the past couple of days that if Congress does not go along with the President's plan for gradually decontrolling old oil he will allow the price control authority to expire August 31st by vetoing any bill that might extend that authority. Does this accurately reflect the President's thinking?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a little too strong. I think the President hopes Congress would approve the decontrol plan when he sends it up there.

Q You have seen these reports?

MR. NESSEN: I have seen those reports. It certainly is an option he could take if Congress did not approve the decontrol plan. The law does expire on August 31st.

Q Ron, would you have a timetable on when this decontrol plan ---

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q A week?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked to the FEA lately. I don't know.

Q Ron, in the late news, the Senate voted to approve women for the Service academies. Now that both the House and Senate have done it, has the President given it any conclusive thought?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any.

Q Do you have any idea how he will react to this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Les.

Q Ron, do you have a better time on when the President is going to announce his candidacy?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, do you think the unemployment rate has hit its peak now?

MR. NESSEN: I think Alan Greenspan said it would stay in the area of where it is. It may go a little higher in the next couple of months before starting to go down.

Q Do you see anything optimistic in today's figures?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't want to use optimistic or pessimistic. I think they are just about in line with what the expectations were here. That kind of increase is typical of a ---

Q Cover-up.

MR. NESSEN: What was that, Jim?

Q I was going to say, we are probably leaving aside the crucial question here of whether former President Nixon was consulted on this cover-up.

MR. NESSEN: Which cover-up is that?

Q The cover-up that was referred to here today.

MR. NESSEN: The May unemployment increase was about in line with what was expected, and the kind of figures you got were what are about typical of this period of bottoming out or the early phases of a recovery.

Employment, as you know, went up by 320,000 people. That is the second month in a row that employment has gone up. There was an exceptionally large increase in the labor force which accounts for the overall increase in unemployment.

Q Ron, did you anticipate getting into this free-for-all when you came out here today? And if not, why not?

MR. NESSEN: Why, you feel I was not prepared, John?

Q I am beginning to wonder.

MR. NESSEN: What is it that you feel I was not prepared for?

Q Ron, this is your briefing. It is not my briefing.

MR. NESSEN: But I always appreciate your help. I need all the help I can get.

Q Well, you were denying things one minute and the next minute you are saying you did not know. You said that in replies to about five questions.

MR. NESSEN: What were they? Maybe I can straighten it out.

Q How many reports have been printed and destroyed of the Rockefeller Commission report? One moment you said none had been, and then the second moment you said you didn't know whether they had printed any.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any reports that have been destroyed.

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Q Do you know, have any been printed?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, as I think I said.

Q All right. That is a difference between "no."

Q You said it was not true that any had been destroyed?

MR. NESSEN: I know none have been destroyed. I don't know whether any have been printed, or if so, how many.

What were the other four, Pat?

Q How do you know none have been destroyed, if you don't know whether any have been printed?

MR. NESSEN: What were the other four contradictions that you saw?

Q I will get the transcript later and pinpoint them to you.

Q I guess, the basic question is, is the report being held up for publication because of what is in it or what is not in it? That is really the basic question.

MR. NESSEN: Mary, I don't know that I would say it is being held up. I would say it has been given to the President to read.

Q But it was supposed to be given to us, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Says who, Mary?

Q The Rockefeller Commission said so.

Q The Vice President of the United States.

MR. NESSEN: If anybody had bothered to ask me over the months, I certainly would have told them exactly what I told Pete Clapper three weeks ago, which is, that the decision would be made after the President had read the report.

Q Ron, can you tell us, is there any irritation in the White House, particularly with the President himself, over the way his Vice President has handled this, leaving so many of us with this impression that a public document was going to be issued, not only sometime, but as a matter of fact, this afternoon and, two, that, as he said so eloquently Monday, "No stones were left unturned, and there would not be anything left out of the report?" Is there any irritation of the way he has handled this?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard the President express any irritation.

Q At any time, were there any other plans to give the report to the President earlier so it could have been released today?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Was Mr. Clapper advised that the timetable suggested in his letter to you might be difficult to meet, if the President was going to read it first?

MR. NESSEN: We never discussed that subject. The way it was always left was, if the President decided to release it, then this chain of events would begin.

Q Well, how could he have decided to release it before having received it?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Did you have any communications with Mr. Clapper after the May 22nd letter?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Have you talked to him since May 22nd?

MR. NESSEN: He stopped in my office this morning to say, "We just delivered the report" and walked out.

Q Any other conversations?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, there was a question asked a moment ago about irritation in the White House, and you replied with an answer "I have not heard the President express any." How about other people in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, is the President concerned that the Rockefeller Commission did not deal with the problem of alleged assassination attempts by the CIA? This report apparently does not deal with that, and does he plan to ask the Rockefeller Commission to continue in existence long enough to look into it?

MR. NESSEN: No. I thought I said long ago he will read the material that has been forwarded to him on alleged assassinations and he would take whatever action he deems appropriate after having read what is there.

Q Has the President talked to Mr. Nixon since he returned from Europe?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, how soon will the material be forwarded to the Church Committee?

MR. NESSEN: The material on alleged assassinations?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: It needs to go through whatever procedures they have set up for the handling of other material, and I don't know how long that takes.

Q Let me see if I can rephrase an earlier question of Pat's to try to get some further elucidation.

After Senator Church made his statement, was the White House afraid that, in effect, the President and the Vice President would be sandbagged by Senator Church, that they would put out a report by the Rockefeller Commission that did not deal with assassination attempts and that Church would then make public a lot of evidence and material that did deal with it and the Rockefeller report would be discredited? Is that what is accounting for this process of delay now that is underway?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, let me answer that two ways. One, there was never any consideration given to any sort of effect on the Church Committee, or of the Church Committee, and the questions seemed to all be prefaced with "What caused the change of mind? Why the reversal? Why are you going back on what was announced," and so forth, and I seem unable to convince anybody that the original plan from the very beginning of the White House was to have the President read the report before a decision was made on releasing it. So, questions that imply that a reversal was made are incorrect.

Q You seemed so -- I guess the way to put it would be cut and dried--up at West Point, that this thing was going to be given out on Friday, today, for Sunday release, and, of course, at that time, the President had not received it, that, we are just -- again, at the risk of belaboring something -- we are just absolutely at a loss to understand how you, yourself, could have contributed to this impression and seemed to be so cut and dried about it and the Rockefeller people seemed to think it was all pretty well set and then have this sudden changeover.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I certainly did not mean to contribute to this impression, because it has always been clearly in my mind, as you see, that the decision would always hinge on the President's decision to release it.

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The other thing I think you need to keep in mind is that we returned from Europe about one o'clock that morning, after being out of touch for seven days, and I had no idea when the President was going to get the Rockefeller Commission Report.

Q Of course, we were up at West Point just a matter of two days ago. What I am saying is, at West Point, you did not seem to send up any flags or rockets saying "Wait a minute boys, hold off on this. The President has not had a chance to read it, hasn't received it."

You seemed thoroughly convinced this was -- you certainly did not attempt to dissuade us from the idea this was going to be put out today for release Sunday. This is why we are left with this confusion in our minds.

MR. NESSEN: You should not be left with any confusion in your mind, Jim. The decision, as I say, from the very beginning--to release it--always hinged on having the President --

Q You did not say that at West Point.

MR. NESSEN: I may not have spelled it out, but as you see, it was always in my mind that, whenever it was released, it was always on the assumption that the President had read it and decided to release it.

Q Peter Clapper put, in that letter to you, he was thinking in terms of giving it out to reporters on Thursday for release Sunday. I don't remember the wording of the letter. Did he specifically mention a specific Thursday and Sunday, or was it just a Thursday-Sunday routine, any Thursday-Sunday?

Did he give a date, and if he gave a date, why didn't you flag him on it saying "That won't give the President enough time to read it?"

MR. NESSEN: He says "The briefing might be on a Thursday with a hold for release for Sunday a.m."

Q Does he not also mention "In an attempt to minimize leaks," which would suggest --

MR. NESSEN: "To provide adequate reading time, while minimizing leak time."

Q Which suggests it would be at some time fairly close to the presentation of the report to the President, presumably?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it would follow the presentation to the President.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

Q You didn't, at that point, say to Peter Clapper "That is not enough time. The President is going to need more time to read it?"

MR. NESSEN: I do have some other materials to give you, since we spent a good deal of time on one subject today.

Q Are you briefing again?

MR. NESSEN: We didn't quite cover, I don't think, all the areas in the news today.

Q Ron, you have been shut off twice by a senior wire service correspondent.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

END

(AT 1:00 P.M. EDT)