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#251

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:25 P.M. EDT

JUNE 20, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President had his usual meetings with staff members this morning. No secret meetings this morning.

The President met with Governor Ray of Iowa, who is the newly elected Chairman of the National Governors' Conference. I think there were photos and film taken at the beginning of that and then I think the Governor went outside and talked to some of you.

The President wanted to congratulate him on his election. They talked mostly in general terms about relationships between the Governors and the President. Governor Ray talked about what he felt was the strong necessity to have a way for the Governors to make their views known to the President.

At 11:30, as you know, the President received this commission report which Senator Hruska has just told you about. There are copies for those who didn't get them.

The President promised to study the report.

Q Over the weekend? (Laughter)

Q The questions were cut off before we could ask the Senator if there were any provisions for mediocre justice? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: He will give the report serious study and he believes the Congress and Chief Justice will do the same. This report was delivered to Congress and to the Chief Justice today also.

You have the full Presidential statement.

Q Will the President appoint Harold Carswell to this court if it is created? (Laughter)

Q Why was it delivered to the President? What is the President's function in this whole operation?

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MR. NESSEN: It was a requirement of the Commission when it was set up -- today is, in fact, the deadline set by the Act that established the Commission -- that today is the day it must be submitted to the President, Congress and the Chief Justice.

We got the word around, I believe, that at 11:30 Dean Burch went over to the Federal Election Commission at 1325 K Street and filed the Statement of Organization for The President Ford Committee.

You also, I think, have a copy of the letter the President sent to Dean Burch authorizing the establishment of that committee.

The documents named Dean Burch as the Chairman and David Packard as the Treasurer.

I think I told you earlier, when Bo Callaway has completed his service as Secretary of the Army shortly, that he will become chairman of the campaign and at the same time a permanent treasurer will be named. When the permanent treasurer is named, David Packard will serve as the national finance Chairman.

Dean Burch has most ably carried out the preliminary planning for the President's campaign and will become, or will continue as the chairman of the advisory Committee for the campaign.

The President believes that Dean has done an outstanding job in getting the campaign underway and the President is delighted that Dean is going to be able to remain as chairman of the advisory committee working with Bo Callaway and the others on the campaign.

Q Ron, what has Burch done exactly?

MR. NESSEN: He is not going to be done, he is going to play a leading role as chairman of the advisory committee.

Q My question was what has he done?

MR. NESSEN: He has gotten the campaign up to where it is today -- the filing of official documents.

Q What else has he done?

MR. NESSEN: He, as you know -- and we talked about this during the past week -- has held a number of meetings at which the questions which need to be answered were first identified and then different people serving on the advisory committee were given the task of finding the answers and making recommendations.

Q Ron, you explained the other day why it was necessary to name Burch as Chairman because Callaway had not finished what he was doing at the Pentagon, and what not. What is the necessity for having a temporary treasurer? Is it simply you have not found the real one yet?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is required -- Well, one, the permanent treasurer has not been designated yet but, more importantly, in order to file these papers --

Q I know why you have to have a treasurer.

MR. NESSEN: Why haven't we named one? The President has not chosen him yet, that is the point.

Q Ron, you strongly implied the other day the reason these documents were being filed today was that the permanent committee wanted to sign a lease for offices. As I read in the papers, the office will be in the same building that the temporary office is. That temporary committee has apparently leased office space. Why was it not necessary to file papers in order to have that committee --

MR. NESSEN: You are quite wrong about that. The advisory committee, which is what I think you are talking about, has no offices. Dean Burch on occasion has had meetings in the conference room of his law office.

The permanent offices of the President Ford Committee will be, I think, at 1200 18th Street, or whatever, which happens to be the same or nearby building to Dean Burch's. But one thing has nothing to do with the other.

Q Will you have a space for Robert Douglass? He is on the advisory committee.

MR. NESSEN: And he continues on the advisory committee.

Q Will he be a member of The President Ford Committee?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any other officials yet to tell you about, but he continues on the advisory committee.

Q Ron, will the President take an active role in the campaign or will he, as Mr. Nixon did in 1972, concentrate on running the Presidency and let others do the campaigning for him? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think the precise role of the President has not been totally firmed up yet, but you will find out about it when it is.

Q Ron, how will the President keep in touch with his committee? Will he have regular briefings from Burch? Will he supervise the committee?

MR. NESSEN: Bo Callaway will be the liaison with the White House, and he will be doing his liaison with the President.

Q Directly?

MR. NESSEN: Directly and with other appropriate White House officials.

Q Who are they?

MR. NESSEN: Hartmann, Calkins and others.

Q Rumsfeld?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there has been any liaison yet.

Q Will he be involved in the political liaison?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know at this point.

I do want you to know that the President is pleased that David Packard will assume the role of the campaign finance chairman. Mr. Packard was the founder of the Hewlett-Packard Corporation, and was formerly Deputy Secretary of Defense.

The President feels that David Packard is an outstanding individual with great experience in American public life, who possesses the integrity and the proven ability to properly represent him in the campaign finance area under the new and complicated Campaign Reform Act.

At 12:45, the President will be meeting with C. John Miller, who is the President of the Independent Petroleum Association of America. Mr. Miller asked for this meeting in order to present to the President the views of the independent petroleum producers.

You may recall back on March 6 Frank Ikard met with the President along with representatives of the major petroleum producers.

In today's meeting with the independent petroleum producers is L. Dan Jones, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Independent Petroleum Association. Bill Seidman, Frank Zarb, Jim Cannon, and Fred Hickman from the Treasury Department will also participate.

The President is meeting at 4 o'clock, as I think we mentioned, with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Syria, Mr. Khaddam. If you are interested, there could be photos and film at the beginning of that, and we will have a report after the meeting.

Q What time, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: We will find out.

Q Ron, does the President plan to issue a report at the conclusion of the reassessment of the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has indicated there would be a method of making known the conclusions of the reassessment, but I don't have the exact details right now.

Q Is there an agenda of the meeting with the Foreign Minister?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have an agenda, Russ.

Q Ron, if you are done with the announcements --

MR. NESSEN: No, I have not finished.

The Khaddam meeting is scheduled for an hour, so I would look for the report on it sometime between 5:00 and 5:30.

Over the weekend, the President will be playing golf, tomorrow, at Burning Tree. The protective travel pool will be going with him.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have an exact time. We will check, or you can check in the morning.

Tomorrow evening, the President will go to Camp David with Mrs. Ford, and then will come back to the White House on Sunday evening.

The President will play golf around 1:00 tomorrow.

On Monday evening, the President and Mrs. Ford will attend the opening night of the Metropolitan Opera's second season at Wolf Trap. The opera is "La Boheme" and it begins at 8 o'clock.

It is a benefit performance, with the proceeds going toward the operation of Wolf Trap; also, a scholarship program for young artists who receive training during the summer at Wolf Trap.

There will, of course, be a travel pool, and the departure time and other arrangements we can announce on Monday for Monday night.

The President is nominating today Dr. Daniel Boorstin to be the Librarian of Congress. I think you have a press release on that.

The President also is accepting today with regret and gratitude for his outstanding services the resignation of Albert Rees as Director of the Council on Wage and Price Stability. That takes effect on July 31.

Dr. Rees has been offered the position of Provost of Princeton University, and I don't have a successor to name today.

Q A housekeeping matter, before you get into questions and answers. What do you expect out of here tomorrow morning before the President plays golf?

MR. NESSEN: Basically nothing. The office will be manned, but I don't expect anything.

I have one other item.

Q Ron, you don't have anything scheduled with Khaddam tomorrow? Is there just this one one-hour meeting scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q That is somewhat less than the other two countries were given. I know there were heads of government and state in each case, respectively. I just wanted to pin that down.

MR. NESSEN: The Foreign Minister is also meeting with Secretary Kissinger and other officials, and I don't have any other plans for a Presidential meeting.

We will be giving you a statement by the President extending to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands his personal greeting and conveying to them his pleasure with the results of their plebiscite of June 17, where a substantial majority, the President was told, had voted in favor of a Commonwealth Covenant.

The balloting was observed by the United Nations and the President wishes to congratulate and commend those who were responsible for the conduct of the plebiscite, including the Plebiscite Commissioner and his staff, the Voter Registration Board and the Plebiscite Advisory Committee.

The next step will be consideration of the covenants by Congress, and the President is saying in this statement that he will submit without delay the covenants with his strong endorsements for its early favorable action.

It is the President's earnest hope that we may look forward to further steps in the near future which will move the people of the Northern Marianna Islands closer to their long desired goal of political union with the United States.

The President says he knows the American people will join him in sending to the people of the Northern Marianna Islands our warmest regards.

Q Ron, is the President proposing a new air base on Tinian, a new major military naval and air facility?

MR. NESSEN: I hadn't heard of it.

Q Was this a Russian type election, just one choice, or did they have a choice? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't actually have that much information on it, Howard, but it was free and fair balloting, I am told, observed by the United Nations and conducted in a fair and impartial manner.

Q This morning Congressman Stark of California, who, as you know, applied to join the Congressional Black Caucus -- he has 65,000 black constituents as opposed to Dellums having less black constituents -- was turned down, and he and Rangel both admitted it was due simply to his skin pigment.

Therefore, I am wondering -- I ask this because the President entertained this group in the White House as one of his earliest acts -- does the President approve of such racial segregation, and will he invite racially segregated groups to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't have any comment on that, Les.

Q Would you be able to get any information on that? Does the President, or doesn't he? (Laughter) I mean, is he in favor? Does he tolerate segregation, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Can we get on to some things now.

Q You have said a couple of times the past couple of weeks you don't think it is appropriate to comment at each stage of the energy bill, but the House did in fact pass the thing yesterday, so do you have any comments, any reaction to the thing today?

MR. NESSEN: Well --- (Laughter) It is very difficult to react to that bill, or what is left of it.

Q But you will try?

MR. NESSEN: What is left of it. I think you really have to go back here and keep in mind what is at stake and not get so involved in day-to-day parliamentary maneuvers that we react to this vote or that vote. I think what the President would like to convey to you today is a reminder how this all started.

It started with an energy policy. It started off with goals, and the goals were to free the United States from dependence on foreign producers of oil by 1985, so that foreign producers of oil could not blackmail or hold the United States hostage either by their raising the prices at their own whim or by cutting off the supplies at their own whim.

So the President started off with that goal and then he presented a policy which will reach that goal.

Now, the President has never for a moment deviated from that goal and hasn't and won't, because he believes it is important to the future and security of the country. I think if you remember how this all started, it was, what, a \$1 -- he took what administrative action he could, which originally was a \$1 increase in the tariff. I think you will recall that was a national security finding.

I think the President believes the country needs to reach those goals to avoid being a hostage to foreign oil producers.

This bill, or what is left of it, passed by the House, simply doesn't get anywhere near those goals.

I can run through the list of specific titles and specifically what is wrong in the titles, but I think it is a wasteful exercise. The point is the President has set those goals; he has told how to get there. Congress -- the House -- not only didn't pass the method of getting there; Congress abandoned the goals.

Now the next step in the process is for the Senate -- and the President believes the Senate has an obligation to do this -- is to start again and to pass an energy bill that reaches the goals, and he, of course, will work with Congress to reach those goals.

Q You say start again. You mean ignore the House bill altogether and start from scratch?

MR. NESSEN: No, to pass a bill that reaches the goals. He is happy to work with Congress because he believes this is a matter of great importance.

Q They are not likely to do that before the date that he planned for the third dollar. Can we assume he is going ahead with that?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, he is reserving judgment on the third dollar until he sees what action Congress does take. He does still have the intention of submitting a decontrol program to Congress.

Q Is there any timetable on decontrol?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a timetable on the decontrol.

Q Does he need to submit a decontrol program to Congress if the present program expires in August?

MR. NESSEN: There is certainly that out there. The program of any controls on the price of oil produced in this country expires on August 31.

Q Why submit one? Then it is almost a foregone conclusion Congress will not act on any decontrol before that.

MR. NESSEN: If you remember, the program the President first raised, it was a phased decontrol program so that the country doesn't suffer a sudden shock, but there is always that prospect of it ending abruptly on the 31st of August.

Q He has been talking about submitting a plan for decontrol for quite a while. What is taking so long?

MR. NESSEN: There were the hearings, and then the FEA has to review the hearing records and bring in proposals to him which he has to review, and decide how he wants to do it.

Q Yes, but when he said he was going to do it in that speech where he tore calendar pages off, people around here and FEA were talking about it being a matter of a week or 10 days, and that is long since passed, and I am frankly puzzled at the delay.

If, as you say, there is a point in doing it in the phased manner, he is well aware that Congress plans to take a recess in August. What is he stalling for?

MR. NESSEN: He is not stalling. You know, as I said before, he does things in an orderly way and when he has had a chance to get the FEA recommendations, read them and make his own mind up, he will do it.

Q Has he asked the FEA to hurry up?

MR. NESSEN: He did ask the FEA about a week ago, not to hurry up, but to move on the thing.

Q Is the President considering just letting the control authority lapse?

MR. NESSEN: That would be a shock to the economy, but that is a possibility.

Q Wouldn't that be an awful rip-off of the oil companies?

MR. NESSEN: The President has always coupled decontrol, whenever he talked about it, with the necessity of a windfall profits tax with the plowback provision.

Q Another factor is that he seems to be waiting to see what the Commerce Committee up in the House does, and yesterday they approved a plan that not only would not allow full decontrol to the world market price but would only let it go up to \$8.50, plus would roll back the price of new oil to \$8.50.

Is the President disappointed in that vote?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is watching the action in that Commerce Committee to see what they are moving toward and whether there is any way to couple his ideas on decontrol with the committee's.

Q Ron, did the geodetic findings that we have much less in the way of oil reserves, affect the President's outlook on his goals? Some people say the best way to solve the oil crisis is to pump out the Arabs' oil and use up as much of that as we can before we use up our own.

Now that we know or think we have less, doesn't that make more sense?

MR. NESSEN: You have to keep that survey in perspective here a little bit. Truly, there is no way of knowing how much oil is out there until you go and start drilling for it and find out where it is and how much there is.

This is one of the reasons the President's program is acceleration of off-shore drilling. It is true there is no way of knowing what is out there until you get out there and start drilling. That is what he wants to do.

The fact of the matter is the previous geodetic survey of domestic oil reserves were between 200 million and 400 million barrels. The President's program, when it was put together it was decided to take an exceedingly conservative view of oil reserves. So the President's program is based on figures of 130 billion barrels, which is considerably lower even than the lowest end of the previous geodetic survey.

The new survey you are talking about estimates oil reserves between 47 billion and 130 billion barrels, which means the estimate on which the President's program is based is at the high end of the geodetic survey rather than the low end of the geodetic survey.

The fact is, again you have to step back a minute and realize it, nobody is basing any program on the idea that America's own oil supply is infinite; it is finite and it is going to run out.

You know, depending on which figures are ultimately proved correct, it is going to run out sooner or later, and that is again part of the President's program to develop alternate sources of oil.

Q Oil or energy?

MR. NESSEN: Both, shale oil and alternate sources of energy, through geothermal, and getting natural gas out of the shale and solar and nuclear. The fact that it is going to run out 50 years sooner than other people think it is makes no difference to the President's program. In fact, it is probably another reason why Congress ought to get on and reach those goals.

Q If that survey is correct, though, it does make a difference, because it could mean the President's program is ill-conceived and his program would use up America's oil reserves faster, and thus bankrupt the next generation of Americans, as far as oil goes.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the change in the geodetic survey now places the figure on which the President's program was based at the high end of the estimate rather than the low end of the estimate. That is the only real change.

Q One time Frank Zarb indicated the White House might be willing to look at the House energy bill even though it is a weak bill, when it is finally finished, take what is good and try to go back and get more later. Is it the view now that there is nothing salvageable in the bill?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are making a mistake to concentrate and narrow your vision down to parliamentary maneuvers, and this feature and that feature.

The fact is the goals have been set and the country has to reach those goals, and the President is determined it will reach those goals.

Q Is there nothing in this bill that goes toward reaching those goals?

MR. NESSEN: This is a bill. It is presented as an energy bill. The President considers it basically a piece of paper. It just doesn't get there. That is all.

Q Ron, I wondered if I could ask a house-keeping question. You have been quoted in two or three different pieces -- I seem to remember the number -- in regard to the communications here that many times you come out prepared to answer questions on what you and apparently the President think are very important, and we don't ever get to those, mainly because you don't want to foist them on us, in that sense. Is there any way we could hit a happy medium, perhaps, by just having a typed list of the subjects posted out here so if we do want to ask we would know what you have on your mind?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't I give you a reaction to the cost of living figures. I know somebody wants to ask that.

Q Would you keep that in mind?

MR. NESSEN: I will keep it in mind, Les.

Q What do you think of CPI, Ron? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You know what the figures are and the meaning of the figures, as interpreted here, is that there is a continuation of the significant reduction in inflationary pressures which began to appear in retail sales late last year.

If you seasonally adjust the increase today, you would come up with a six percent annual rate of inflation. The President thinks that is too high, but it is only half or less than half the rate of just a year ago.

There some encouraging figures in the food prices -- some are up, some are down -- but basically, overall, the food prices have risen at an annual rate of only two percent so far this year.

The White House finds it especially encouraging to note that the prices of the category, the quite important category of non-food commodities and services, rose only .2 of a percent in May, and that is a considerable reduction from earlier in the year, in the rate of increase.

Q What is that? Non-food commodities and services?

MR. NESSEN: It is two separate categories -- services -- you know what services are -- and commodities, other than foods.

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Q It sounds like one category.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. I did make it sound like that.

Anyway, the White House believes that this is a reflection of what you have seen in the wholesale price pressures earlier in the year are now working their way through and showing up in the retail level.

Q Does the White House believe this trend will continue?

MR. NESSEN: The White House believes, now, at least, the strong inflationary pressures have been dampened but the President, I think you know well, thinks that Congress needs to act in a responsible way to avoid rekindling the inflation.

Q Ron, in connection with that, one of the things the President said he was going to do to cope with inflation was propose no new spending programs.

MR. NESSEN: That's right.

Q Just yesterday he proposed a new spending program in the area of compensating victims of crime. Why did he do that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is a new spending program. That is something that the taxpayers don't pay. It comes out of the fines paid by people who are found guilty of various offenses, plus a percentage of the money that convicts accumulate for work in prison.

Q It is money the taxpayers pay. Otherwise, it would go into the general fund and would reduce the need for Government borrowing just as much as income taxes go into the general fund.

MR. NESSEN: It is a little fuzzy to call it a new spending program, but in any case, the President feels that it is a worthwhile purpose for which to use these fines and convict labor paychecks.

Q Ron, given the fact that this set of figures is beginning to look much more favorable than the other set dealing with the recession, particularly where unemployment is concerned, is the President reconsidering at all the ban on new spending and the level of spending and deficit?

MR. NESSEN: Definitely not. It is going to be tough to hold the deficit to \$60 billion. You have the Government dipping in for \$60 billion next year, and I guess we are up to about \$44 billion this year, over \$100 billion coming out of the economy, which can either be paid for by printing new money, which causes inflation, or by raising interest rates, which contribute to inflation.

If you think the battle is over, you are absolutely wrong.

Q Is there anything you can say about a veto of the housing bill?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has until the 24th and has not made a decision.

Q Anything you can say about Middle East reassessments? Is there any indication of time, when we might be able to expect this? I mean, it is not going to go beyond the summer, is it, Ron, or do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have a time to give you.

Q Do you have anything to say about the charges in Zaire that the CIA was involved in the assassinations, and particularly anything to say on the ouster of the U.S. envoy?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't think that was the specific charge, that the CIA had been involved. In any case, I think Kissinger has said himself, and certainly the State Department has said --

Q I know what they have said. I wondered what the President's reaction was to the ouster of the envoy.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see the notes I have made, but the United States has denied those charges.

Q There wasn't any announcement of a briefing that I heard downstairs, so I came in late. Did the President have any reaction or remarks to the filing of his papers? I asked him this morning, and he said you might have something. Has he expressed any enthusiasm for the campaign? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if you were here when I read his feelings toward Dean Burch and Dave Packard, but you have a text of his letter. I think it would be fair to say that he is looking forward to the campaign with enthusiasm.

The official word on the Zaire charges is that it is sheer nonsense. (Laughter)

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:58 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 5:45 P.M. EDT

JUNE 20, 1975

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President and Foreign Minister Khaddam met in the Oval Office for 75 minutes. The meeting was also attended on the American side by Secretary of State Kissinger, Under Secretary Sisco, Ambassador Richard Murphy, and Lieutenant General Scowcroft, and on the Syrian side, in addition to the Foreign Minister, by the Ambassador, Sabah Cabbani.

As you know, the President's meeting with Minister Khaddam followed the Minister's meeting and working lunch with Secretary of State Kissinger. The President appreciated this opportunity to renew his acquaintance with Foreign Minister Khaddam, and the opportunity it provided both sides to review the current situation in the Middle East.

The President and the Foreign Minister exchanged views on the roads which might be followed in order to maintain momentum toward a negotiated settlement in the Middle East.

The President asked Foreign Minister Khaddam to convey to President Assad his conviction that all parties in the Middle East must do everything possible to avoid stagnation in the process of moving toward peace in the Middle East, and his determination -- that is, the President's determination -- that the United States will make every effort to help in this process and to assure that there is no stalemate.

While the principal matter discussed was the overall Middle East situation, Syria-United States bilateral ties were also reviewed. The President and the Foreign Minister noted that this week marks the first anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations between Syria and the United States.

That was on June 16, 1974. They expressed their mutual pleasure at the evolution of relations between the two countries. The President reassured Foreign Minister Khaddam of the United States' interest in the further expansion and deepening of ties between the two countries.

That is the end of the statement.

Q Ron, is this the end of the President's reassessment procedures then?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I think you would have to say that this was one in a series of consultations which the United States is having with the parties. I expect that the process of consultations will continue through diplomatic channels prior to any decisions being reached.

Q What about a timetable for a conclusion of the reassessment now, please?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have one for you, Walt.

Q Is the President planning to meet with any other heads of state or heads of Government in the Middle East before he makes a final determination on the reassessment?

MR. NESSEN: The process of consultations will continue through diplomatic channels.

Q I understand that, but does he plan to meet with any of the leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I, at the moment, don't have anything to announce along that line.

Q Ron, was the President at all miffed that the Israeli labor party put out a plan indicating that Israel plans to hold on to the Golan Heights in a final peace settlement, and the timing of that was on the eve of the Foreign Minister's visit?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would rather not address that directly, Mort, other than to say the talks were useful for the President to review all the approaches for further progress with the Syrians, as he has done with officials of the other parties.

I just don't think it would be appropriate to go into the details of the discussion.

Q I wasn't talking about that. Yesterday, the Israeli labor party --

MR. NESSEN: I know, and I just would rather not comment on it.

Q Ron, what will mark the conclusion of the reassessment?

MR. NESSEN: When the President decides that it is concluded.

Q What will he do when it is concluded?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has indicated publicly that he would make his conclusions known, but I don't have either a timetable or a method to tell you today for making those conclusions known.

Q Originally, we were talking about towards the end of this month, but now is it safe to say sometime after the 4th of July?

MR. NESSEN: I would just rather not get locked into a timetable, Tom.

Q Dr. Kissinger last week, after the Rabin visit, told us two or three weeks. Are you still sticking to that? Are we now one or two weeks away from it?

MR. NESSEN: If that was Dr. Kissinger's last public statement, it has not changed that I know of.

Q Ron, you said he would make his conclusions known. Will that include his views of what a settlement should look like in the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: At this time, I can't tell you what the conclusions will look like because he hasn't reached them yet.

Q Ron, we have been talking about a plan the President was going to present to the two sides.

MR. NESSEN: I never have heard that, Bob.

Q At least he said he would have specific recommendations if he thought the two sides were open to it.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. It was always that he would consider what he had heard from the various parties, and then I think he said if it was appropriate or helpful he might offer his own suggestions.

Q Well, he was more specific than that. He said he would come up with a plan and Kissinger said that at one point in the last briefing here. My question is, did he present any kind of a plan to the Syrian Foreign Minister?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would just rather not go into the details of what they talked about, Bob.

Q Did the President ask the Syrian President, President Assad, to visit the United States during the talks this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: I think the way today's meeting came about was that the President invited President Assad to send what he considered to be an appropriate representative to the States, and that is how the Foreign Minister came to be here. At the moment, I don't know of any plans for a visit by President Assad.

Q Ron, is the President moderately optimistic, as Mr. Luns suggested yesterday, that a settlement will be achieved within the next two or three months?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is really very helpful to play with the adjectives, Russ. I think the thrust of his feeling is that there needs to be progress because the history of the Middle East in recent years has been, when there is not progress, when there is a stalemate, the tensions build.

I would rather not try to characterize with a simple word or two his feeling. I think it is too complicated.

Q The reason I raise that question is the President was quoted just two or three days earlier in a Minneapolis interview that the Middle East seems to be drifting toward war.

MR. NESSEN: No, I think if you read the full text of that, Russ, the context of that was that the longer the stalemate goes on, the more tensions rise and the greater danger that poses. That has been the history, and that is what he believes.

Q Ron, what did the President mean by saying he was forcing a program of progress in that same interview?

MR. NESSEN: I have to look at the transcript, Marilyn. I don't recall that phrase.

Q He didn't want there to be a stalemate so he was forcing a program of progress?

MR. NESSEN: It sounds like "forcing" might have been a typo. I don't recall him saying forcing during the interview.

Q Does the President feel that his discussions this afternoon have hastened progress toward resumed negotiations or moved us any closer towards a new Middle East settlement?

MR. NESSEN: There were no specific agreements reached today on future courses of action.

Q I understand that. I said, did these discussions this afternoon move us any closer to a Middle East settlement after we heard the Syrians' views?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think I can characterize that, Walt, other than to say it is part of the consultations.

Q What is the background on this meeting, Ron? Did the Foreign Minister request it?

MR. NESSEN: No, as I say, sometime ago the President invited President Assad to send a representative here, and it was President Assad's choice to send his Foreign Minister. That is the background of the meeting.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 5:57 P.M. EDT)