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

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:28 A.M. MST

DECEMBER 27, 1975

SATURDAY
(Vail, Colorado)

MR. NESSEN: Let me give you a couple of things to start with.

The President has waived certain restrictions concerning burial at Arlington Cemetary in order that Mr. Welch, the American official killed in Athens, can be buried at Arlington Cemetary. He will be buried at Arlington Cemetary a week from yesterday--in other words, next Friday.

In addition, the President has also directed that a Jet Star go to Providence, Rhode Island, next Friday to bring the brother, sister and mother of Mr. Welch to Washington to attend the funeral at Arlington.

Q What are the names?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the names, I am sorry.

The President was contacted -- the White House was contacted, rather, by Senator Pell of Rhode Island and Senator Gary Hart of Colorado who raised this possibility of both the burial at Arlington and sending the plane for the family.

Q Which Senator raised the burial and which Senator raised the --

MR. NESSEN: They both discussed both matters, Senators Pell and Gary Hart, and the President agreed to this.

Q What were the restrictions that had to be waived?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the restrictions on burial at Arlington. I think it is limited to members of the Armed Services.

Q It is even more than that.

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MR. NESSEN: I think they tightened the restrictions even beyond that.

Q All veterans, too?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the new restrictions. Anyhow, there were restrictions which would have prevented the burial but the President waived them. He said this morning the reason he waived them was, "He certainly died in the service of his country."

Secondly, I want to announce a Presidential trip. It is on the 5th of January to St. Louis to deliver a speech to the National Convention of the American Farm Bureau.

The President will leave the White House relatively early in the morning, go out for the speech and come back toward the middle of the afternoon. If there are any other events connected with the trip, we will announce them later, but there will be no political events connected with the trip and if there are any at all, I will let you know what they are later.

Q Is this a political speech in the President's view or yours?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is a speech in his role as President of the United States.

Q Is it a farm speech and agricultural speech?

MR. NESSEN: The exact contents have not been decided on.

Q Is this the day Mr. Reagan kicks off his campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure anybody knew that was the day. I certainly didn't. I have not heard it mentioned in connection with his speech.

Q Ron, obviously, there are other events under consideration. Are they in St. Louis if, in fact, there are other events being considered, or might they be somewhere between St. Louis and Washington?

MR. NESSEN: If there is anything at all, it will be in St. Louis. If there is anything, it might be perhaps a meeting with reporters -- something like that.

Q Can you give KMOX a little inside dope on this?

MR. NESSEN: What? (Laughter)

Q Didn't you know that Aldo is the voice of KMOX?

MR. NESSEN: Is he stringing for KMOX?

What I am saying is if there are any other events, that would be the nature.

Q A press conference?

MR. NESSEN: There isn't anything scheduled at the moment.

The President signed a bill this morning. It amends the Small Reclamations Projects Act and we have an explanation of it. I won't go into it here, but John and Thym will pass it out immediately after the briefing.

To give you some idea of what the President's plans are for today, he does plan to ski beginning at about 11 o'clock. The visibility is not great today because of the snow. He said this morning that this makes skiing more difficult and he probably would not ski quite as long today as normal, maybe about two hours. He has asked three of your colleagues to ski with him today as his guests. They are Charles Tasnadi, Russ Ward and Grace Bassett. He also will ski with Trammell Crowe, a Dallas businessman and friend of his.

Q How are the three seated? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, maybe we will find out after the skiing. The last one to survive wins.

Q What are the ground rules on that?

MR. NESSEN: They are guests of the President.

Q Let Helen go. (Laughter)

Q Will the President give us a report on their skiing?

MR. NESSEN: The President will give a pool report on their skiing, right.

Q This is a serious question.

MR. NESSEN: They are guests and, as normal, when they are guests, it is all off the record.

Q They can answer questions, can't they?

MR. NESSEN: Of course, if you would like to talk to your colleagues afterwards.

Q Wait a minute. If they would like to do a pool report, that would be very welcome.

MR. NESSEN: Well, they are guests of the President, Helen, which I think means that it is off the record.

Q Ron, I can only speak for myself, but I would have no objection. I can't imagine anybody else would if one of the three reporters wanted to do something with that. I don't think it is fair to bar Grace --

MR. NESSEN: I'm not barring, I'm just saying that -- everybody talked to Pepi when he skied with the President -- Henri Patty, Jim Brown, you know --

Q If somebody wanted to go on the air and say he skied with the President and Grace wanted to write that, what's wrong with that?

Q I object because the opposition will be there for two hours and we may lose out a lot.

Q You mean really off the record? If its off the record, they couldn't use it at all. They don't have a responsibility to us.

MR. NESSEN: Every day we put out a list of everybody the President skied with. You can put out a list of these three, but to keep a verbatim transcript of everything he says during the skiing, I think, takes them out of the guest category and makes it reporting.

Q Can't we have a pool report from them?

MR. NESSEN: I think it would be better for you to interview them afterwards as guests of the President.

Q The question I am raising is are they free to talk to us?

MR. NESSEN: My view is the President is skiing with them because he wants to ski with some people who can ski. The fact they skied with him, I think, is on the record and I think beyond that it should be off the record.

Q That means no pool report or anything.

MR. NESSEN: Let's say that the fact that they skied with him is on the record, but other than that their experiences on the slopes are off the record.

Now for the rest of the day. As I say, because of the visibility, the President thinks he will ski probably only about two hours today. I did mention Trammell Crowe as the other skier. The President will go home, have lunch, probably watch some of the football games this afternoon.

At 6 o'clock the President has invited about 25 members of his staff and their wives to come over to his house for a little reception and then after that, about 7:30, the President will go over to the Red Lion for what some of you may remember from last Christmas is an annual reunion dinner for members of his old college fraternity, the Deaks, and we will get up a guest list, as much as we can, of who is there and what chapter they belong to of Deaks.

Q Is that also Delta Kappa Epsilon?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is that all the University of Michigan?

MR. NESSEN: No, there are a lot of people here vacationing and they went to various schools. Some went to the University of Michigan but some to other schools.

The President has continued to make some phone calls, holiday greeting phone calls, and he has called the following people: Hugh Scott, John Rhodes, Mike Mansfield, Bob Griffin and Bob Byrd. He has plans to make additional holiday phone calls to Speaker Albert, Tip O'Neill and Bob Michel.

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Q Did you say he plans to call these people?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he plans to try to get those calls through today.

Q Are any of these political calls?

MR. NESSEN: They are just holiday greeting calls.

We have installed a TV here so the games can be watched. We also may have some liquid refreshment. We will have liquid refreshment, I am told.

Q The courtesy of whom?

MR. NESSEN: The courtesy of an anonymous donor, I think.

Q Did the President acknowledge Mao Tse Tung's birthday with a message?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware he did, Tom.

Q Is this a one time exemption on the CIA agent or will all agents who are killed overseas be qualified for burial at Arlington?

MR. NESSEN: I think this particular case was judged on its own merit.

Just by way of background, you may recall that there was some State Department people killed in the Sudan a while back and the President made the same waiver so they could be buried in Arlington. It is a case by case matter, Tom, and not a precedent.

Q Wasn't that Nixon?

Q Which President waived the Sudan people? Was that Ford or Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the precise date on that.

Q It was Nixon, I am sure.

MR. NESSEN: We will check that.

Q Do you know what time the President got up this morning?

MR. NESSEN: He said he slept in a little bit this morning. Cheney got there a little after 9 o'clock. I don't have the exact awakening time but he said he slept a little later than usual.

Q Are you accepting the premise of Tom's question that this man was connected with the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: I think Bill Colby has acknowledged that.

Q Are you acknowledging it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Was he the top CIA official in Greece?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know enough about the organization to say that, but it has been acknowledged in Washington he was a CIA man.

Q The other day when we asked you, you said you had no idea whether he was with CIA.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't.

Q Here the President is making decisions on his burial and everything else and you don't know whether he was the top CIA official there or not?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Does the President know?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He knows whether he is CIA or not?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He does know whether he was the top CIA official or not?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: There is a little discussion up here as to why I can't say Welch was the top CIA agent or whether he was just a CIA agent. I really don't know.

Q Is the President concerned that the lives of CIA agents all over the world might be jeopardized if their cover has been blown in various ways by the publication of their names?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, emphatically he does have that concern.

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Q Is he doing anything that you would want to tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has done some things that you know already know about, Lou. During various negotiations and discussions with committees on the Hill which wanted to reveal names, I think the White House made very clear, and so did Secretary Kissinger and Bill Colby, that the publication of agent's names could jeopardize their lives.

I think you remember that period when the White House was making that argument very strongly.

Q Do you think the fact that this person's name was known, his identity or CIA connection was known, was responsible or partly responsible for his being murdered?

MR. NESSEN: The President thinks so.

Q Ron, have there been any transfers, as a result, to get these people whose covers have been blown out of the country?

MR. NESSEN: Aldo, I obviously don't have that much detailed information and even if I did, it would probably be something we would not talk about for the same reasons.

Q You know, if they left, they wouldn't be in danger.

MR. NESSEN: You need to talk to the CIA about that, I think, Aldo.

Q You are not suggesting it was Congress that was responsible for the publication of this man's name, are you?

MR. NESSEN: I don't mean for a minute to imply that. I think Lou's question was a more general question of, "Does the President think the publication of names does endanger agents' lives?"

I used as an example the fact that he does, as indicated by the public argument made by the White House at that time. I don't mean to say Congress was responsible for this man's death.

Q Several month's ago the President said he was going to issue an Executive Order and seek legislation for overhauling the intelligence set-up. Where is that?

MR. NESSEN: That is in the hands of the President. There was a large book put together before we left Washington with recommendations, comments and views of all the various agencies involved in intelligence. The President brought that with him and is studying it while he is out here.

Q Does the President think there is anything he can do to prevent the publication of names of CIA agents and, if so, is he going to take any action to prevent that in the future?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly publicly urged it, as has the Secretary of State and Director Colby.

As far as taking any specific steps, I don't know of any specific steps other than the public expression of his concern.

Q Ron, what is Senator Hart's interest in Welch?

MR. NESSEN: I am not clear as to Senator Hart's interest in the Welch case. I don't know whether the Welch family has an involvement in Colorado or not. I just know Gary Hart was one of the two that urged this.

Q I am not familiar with the background on the Welch case. Could you tell me under what circumstances Welch's name was published?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I should do that. You can see in the paper -- there was an underground paper that published his name, address and phone number and an English paper in Athens published it.

Q Are you saying this large book the President has, he is moving on a decision as to what to do about the apparatus?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Helen said the fact that the President brought this book of changes on intelligence operations means he is moving towards a decision. The answer is yes. As to how soon, I don't have the time table.

Q Not while he is in Vail?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q The publication, the underground publication is the one called "Counterspy", isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: Bill Colby has given his view and the Administration views on the specific mention of Mr. Welch's name, but I was answering Lou in more general terms about the whole question of naming CIA agents and how it could jeopardize their lives.

Q The President thinks the publication of this man's name was responsible for his death?

MR. NESSEN: Partly responsible, yes.

Q Are there any other instances that the President is aware of which are comparable that have led him to be concerned about the lives of agents elsewhere?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, Dick. I didn't ask him that and don't know the answer.

Q Ron, I understand that Army Secretary Hoffman is being sent to Korea in a couple of weeks, about the 15th of January. Are there any military or diplomatic developments that concern the President in Korea?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't aware Hoffman was going. I will check, Nick.

Q Has the President stated any views since yesterday relative to the Soviet's response on Angola?

MR. NESSEN: No. He has stated his views and stands by them.

Q Does he have anything in the works relative to the publication of the increased expense costs of the B-1 bomber, which are up 16 percent, and that means a \$3 billion increase in the defense budget. How does he feel about that?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't ask him, Walt.

Q Do you know if the President feels the CIA's effectiveness has been hurt thus far by the Congressional investigations? He stated his concern this could happen. Does he think it has happened? Does he think the CIA is functioning as well as ever?

MR. NESSEN: I think I know the answer to that but I would like to run it past the President one more time before talking about it.

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Q Is it your anticipation the President will act on all the 26 bills still awaiting decision?

MR. NESSEN: My anticipation is he is not likely to act on all of them before we go home. Most have to be acted on by early January and some of the bills are physically not even here. The analyses of the bills are here so he could make his decisions, but as for physically signing them, I think some of them will not be signed or vetoed until we get back to Washington.

Q Is it 26? Isn't it 27?

MR. NESSEN: He signed one yesterday and one today. I think it is 26 today.

Q It was 29.

MR. NESSEN: 19 plus one yesterday, plus one today is 21, and we started with 48.

Q Can you project next week at all?

MR. NESSEN: Let me project today, first. I have to go back over there, incidentally, and I want to try and wrap this up.

Today, we will post later this afternoon a guest list for the Deak dinner and anything else at 5 o'clock. I don't really, frankly, anticipate anything else so you might just want to check with the Message Center to see if there is anything.

Q Tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow morning I don't think we will have a briefing. You might check here at 10 o'clock to see if we have anything posted and again tomorrow afternoon at 5 o'clock for a posting.

Q What time tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: 10:00 and 5:00 for postings.

I don't, frankly, recall what the social plan is for tomorrow night but we will post that for tomorrow. No briefing tomorrow, postings at 10:00 and 5:00, if there is anything. I will post even the ski plan and skiers and so forth.

Next week, Helen asked me to project -- we get back on Tuesday evening. He is supposed to get to the White House around 5:30. I would say he would resume work on the State of the Union and the budget and the legislative proposals and I don't have anything beyond that, Helen.

Obviously, he will finish up signing the bills he doesn't sign this week.

Q What will he do New Year's Eve?

MR. NESSEN: He has a couple of things he is thinking of doing New Year's Eve and has not made the decision.

Q Is there a chance there would be something to cover New Year's Eve?

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

Q At the White House, possibly?

Q If they are outside the White House, we will cover them.

MR. NESSEN: I think one of the things you know the President is thinking of doing but has not made a decision on is going to Camp David for New Year's Eve. He has not decided.

Q Do you know when he will know so we can plan?

MR. NESSEN: Did somebody say thank you?

Q Ron, is there going to be a fund raiser Monday night?

MR. NESSEN: Frank said is there going to be a fund raiser in Vail Monday night. The answer is no. The President is going to a dinner at Sheika's on Monday night. It is not a fund raiser. I will give you more details of that on Monday.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 10:53 A.M. MST)