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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:40 A.M. EST

JANUARY 23, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: Let me give you a couple of things on the President's schedule.

The other night, when he went over to the Kennedy Center, he invited the cast of "Hello Dolly" to take a tour of the White House, which they did this morning, and they stopped in to say hello to him, about 30 members. It was only a little brief stop through the office.

The President is over now in the East Room saying a few words to about 250 husbands and wives of Government officials who are receiving a briefing on the budget and the State of the Union Message. The purpose of bringing in spouses is so they are familiar with the kind of work their husbands and wives are doing, and familiar with the Administration's position so they have something to talk about at the dinner table.

Q Is Rod Hills one of the spouses?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see. That family falls under two categories. The briefings, I think, the main briefings, are being done by Paul O'Neill and Alan Greenspan and Jim Cannon and the President will greet the spouses at the beginning and Mrs. Ford will possibly close the meeting.

Q Does the President feel he drives his staff too hard?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think so.

Q Why was that closed for coverage?

MR. NESSEN: It is half a day briefing for them. The briefing will be precisely the same as the briefings that have already been given to the press.

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Q Ron, is Mrs. Nessen there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, she said she was going to be.

For the presentation of diplomatic credentials -- I think you have seen this; it is on today's schedule -- the Ambassadors are from Nepal, Papua New Guinea and the People's Republic of Benin, which used to be Dahomey.

At 3:45 the President will speak to a number of industry leaders to kick off the 1976 savings bond campaign. That is open for coverage. It is in the State Dining Room at 3:45. You should start setting up at 3:00. It is the kick-off of the savings bond program, and it is to bring in some leaders of industry who will lead the campaign in various parts of the country and give them a pep talk. There are 80 members, and I only have a partial list. We will get it for you.

At 4:30 there is an energy meeting in the Cabinet Room, with the President, Bill Simon, Seidman, Zarb, Greenspan, Lynn, Cheney, Cannon, et cetera, and the subject of this is a review of the pending energy legislation in Congress.

The main ones that will be reviewed, their status, are the deregulation of natural gas, the production of fuel from the Navy petroleum reserves and amendments to the Clean Air Act, and Frank will review where each of these pieces of legislation stands.

The latest reaction count for the State of the Union -- this is as of about 10:30 this morning -- it is growing and reflecting now the letters that are beginning to come in. This is a total of mail, telegrams and phone calls as of 10:30.

In favor of the speech and the President's proposals, 528; opposed to the President's proposals, 122; and various assorted comments, 96.

Q All unsolicited?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

The economic report briefing -- just to run over again with you one more time -- there has been a change of room number, incidentally. First, you know the economic report itself will be handed out tomorrow at noon here, embargoed for noon Monday.

There will be a briefing on Monday at 9:30. It has moved to the New EOB, and the Room number is 2008. The briefing on the economic report, which is embargoed for release at noon on Monday, you can get in with either a gallery press credential or White House press credential.

Q For those of us who will not be working Saturday, will copies be available of the report Monday morning over there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they will.

Q How about Sunday? Suppose somebody wants to write that thing on Sunday for Monday release? Will they be able to get a copy over here, or are you all closed up on that day?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean instead of Saturday? Yes, somebody will be here on Sunday. We could leave it in your name in an envelope at the Northwest Gate, if you would like to do it that way.

This is not a Presidential appointment, but just because she is a friend of many of us, I did want to tell you that Secretary Hills is announcing today that Grace Bassett is going to be her Assistant for Public Affairs.

I think you all know Grace. She was with the Hearst Newspaper Service and the King Features Syndicate. She was a consultant and fellow at Columbia University, worked for the Washington Star and also for the Washington Post, and won a number of Guild awards and other awards for her writing.

She will now be with Carla at HUD as her Public Affairs Officer.

The President is going on Sunday night, as many of you know, to an event at the Kennedy Center, which is a Bicentennial Salute to the Performing Arts. This is in honor of Roger Stevens, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Just to give you some quick idea of how that is going to go, the President will leave here with Mrs. Ford at about 7:15 Sunday night. We will have a travel pool.

They get over there and they go in the Opera House. The guests in the box there with the President will be Mrs. Onassis, Ambassador Orfila of the OAS, who is Mrs. Onassis' escort. His first name is Alejandro. Mr. and Mrs. Roger Stevens will also be in the box, and the Vice President and Mrs. Rockefeller.

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There are two acts to this performance. The first one will consist of the Norman Schribner Choir, Art Buchwald -- I don't know what he is going to do; I think it is dancing -- Henry Fonda, Carol Channing, a song called "Hello Roger" -- that is true -- and some other folks, including Marion Anderson.

In the second act are the Paul Hill Chorale, Pearl Bailey, Tammy Grimes, and Cyril Richard. The finale is from the musical called "Bubbling Brown Sugar," and other assorted acts.

The President will be back at the White House at about 10:00.

Q Ron, will a travel pool be able to follow this time so we can avoid what happened on the last Kennedy Center visit?

MR. NESSEN: I am not really sure. If he goes backstage, we will certainly do the best we can to keep the pool close to him.

I heard about what happened the other night, and I don't know all the details, but we will try to keep the pool as close to the President as we can.

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Q If we go backstage ahead of him --

MR. NESSEN: I think the problem the other night was the President went backstage unexpectedly after the pool had been moved out.

Q Ron, you said you would check on the President's position on abortion.

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish this, Les.

The wires indicate the some officials in Michigan say the President is coming to Dearborn a week from Saturday and they are right. The President is going to Dearborn a week from Saturday. It is the 31st. The exact schedule is not lined up exactly but he will leave here about 9:00 or so and go to Dearborn, landing at Detroit Metropolitan Airport, go to the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn. The event is the Midwestern Republican Conference. The President will speak to them at approximately 11 o'clock in the morning, will attend a reception immediately afterward and then go back to the airport and fly on to Williamsburg.

Q What is the Midwestern Conference?

MR. NESSEN: It is a meeting of Midwestern Republicans?

Q I know, but what is it? Is it a fund raiser or seminar or what?

Q Who are they?

Q What is the sponsoring organization?

MR. NESSEN: It is expected to be attended by approximately 1500 delegates from 13 Midwestern States.

Q Is that something you put together?

MR. NESSEN: No, this is an annual kind of thing, and that is about all I have the details of.

Q He goes on to Williamsburg?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What is in Williamsburg?

MR. NESSEN: I thought we already talked about that. It is a Bicentennial event at the House of Burgesses.

Q Are these State and county Republican Chairmen from the Midwest? Do you know anything about the composition of the group?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, but why don't you call the RNC. It is their event.

Q Will the RNC pick up part of the tab or all of the tab?

MR. NESSEN: I think, under the ruling of the FEC, any time the President speaks to a big group after January 1, it has to be paid for by the PFC, even though there will not be any personal campaigning.

Q The whole trip?

MR. NESSEN: The formula is round trip Wasington to Detroit.

Q How much money do they have now? Do you have the latest figure on it?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't the faintest notion.

Q What time will the Williamsburg speech be?

MR. NESSEN: About 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Q Are you suggesting he will not try to advance his own candidacy at this meeting?

MR. NESSEN: He will not either in his speech or directly in any other way try to advance his own candidacy.

Q Ron, do you have an estimated return time from Williamsburg to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I do not. I did not bring that schedule with me.

Q Why is he doing that, by the way? I don't mean that facetiously, but when the President is challenged from within his own party and he goes to a meeting of Midwestern Republicans, it seems a little incongruous that he is not trying to advance his own candidacy. I don't see anything wrong with it.

MR. NESSEN: He is leader of the Republican Party and they felt they wanted the party leader to address their convention, so they invited him to attend.

Q He is trying to get them to vote for him in the convention.

MR. NESSEN: I say the speech will not appeal for votes, nor will he, in private conversations, appeal for votes.

Tomorrow's physical examination--I don't have many more details now except that the way I think it is going to go is around 2 o'clock Lukash will come down and give you a kind of quick report on the examination and then will prepare a more detailed written report which will be released some time next week.

Q Around 2:00, did you say?

MR. NESSEN: Around 2:00, yes.

Q Will that be for film coverage and recordable?

MR. NESSEN: I guess so, yes.

Q Have the other difficulties been straightened out, the ones that Dr. Lukash just raised about the release?

MR. NESSEN: We may not have film on Saturday. I have not talked to Bill yet.

Q Up here or at Bethesda?

MR. NESSEN: Here. The President leaves at 7:30, so I guess the pool should be here at 7:00 on Saturday, the travel pool.

Q Would you consider this an instant analysis of the President's condition?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is why the more detailed analysis is coming next week.

Q Ron, was the President's decision to go to Dearborn related in any way to Reagan's decision not to?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. It was considered as an invitation and accepted. I don't know whether anybody here even knew -- in fact I don't know whether he is going or not.

Q Ron, now about abortion. You said you would check on the President's view.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I don't have anything I am able to give you today on that.

Q Is it possible to get something by tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I doubt it.

Q He isn't going to take a position, Ron, is that it?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, Les, it is an issue on which the President would like to have his thoughts well considered and so forth, and I don't have them for you at this time.

Q He has not taken a position in the past, is that it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether he has or not. I will get it for you when he has it.

Q Ron, on appointments. Has a fellow named Boorstin -- I believe Dan Boorstin's son -- been added to the speechwriting group?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Do you have anything today on the President's feeling about the SBA nominee?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Is that Mr. Kobelinski?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I am told that whatever his holdings are the White House knew about them, and I think you probably know that everyone who is considered for appointment here needs to turn in a form on which he lists his holdings, and that is reviewed for a possible conflict of interest. So his holdings were reviewed and also his -- I am not familiar with the details of it -- but he has a plan for what to do with his holdings and he also made the commitment to disqualify himself in cases involving his own holdings. This was submitted to the Office of the White House Counsel, which reviewed it and concluded that the arrangements that Mr. Kobelinski proposed did not constitute either a conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict of interest.

So on the basis of that decision having been made by the Counsel's Office, the nomination went forward. Now I am told that Senator Proxmire has requested the use of the Justice Department on the matter and I suppose Senator Proxmire will make public the letter, but the Assistant Attorney General, Mr. Cole, replied to Senator Proxmire yesterday that "Mr. Kobelinski's agreement to disqualify himself from any particular matter coming before him as Administrator involving either of the banks" -- I suppose those are the banks he is involved with -- "will avoid any potential conflict of interest problems under 18 USC 208 arising from his holding of the securities."



The additional step, which Mr. Kobelinski proposes to take, go beyond the statutory requirements, and, in my judgment, serve to eliminate any appearance of conflict of interest as to his holdings in these banks.

Q Ron, what is the President's thinking on seeking a treaty with Spain instead of the usual Executive Agreement on bases?

MR. NESSEN: First, I am told the negotiations with the Spanish on the bases question is not concluded; that it is still going on, but the State Department is prepared to discuss the issue of whether it will or should be a treaty or an agreement.

Q Can you give us any details today on what the Secretary of State has reported back to the President vis a vis his discussions in Moscow?

MR. NESSEN: He has given a very detailed report and in fact it is in the middle of the President's desk now. His latest report is right in the middle of the President's desk now. I would say that the Secretary and also a senior American official have talked about the progress made in Moscow and I don't think I can add anything to it other than to say that the Secretary is due back on Sunday, although the time is not clear yet.

He will report to the President shortly after returning--although whether that is to be Sunday or Monday has not been arranged yet--and that the two Governments will review themselves the progress made at Moscow, and I would think in a period of weeks will decide on what the next step ought to be.

Q Does the President believe we are any closer to a SALT II agreement?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am going to leave it at what Henry said in Moscow.

Q Ron, what can you tell us about the story on the front page of the Star about the U.S. intentions on foreign aid to Israel?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the story at all, Bob. I am not familiar with it. I did not see the Star before I came down.

Q Ron, did Frank Zarb ever tell the President he would resign if the President vetoed the compromise energy bill?

MR. NESSEN: Frank indicated to me today he had not.

Q Ron, on the situation in Lebanon, do you have anything you can say from the U.S. Government side?

MR. NESSEN: No. The situation and our reaction to it is the same today.

Q Ron, any date yet for release of the updated version of the President's personal finances?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't have a date. As you know, he has committed himself to do it and I think Phil Buchen is working on it, but I don't have a date for you.

Q Ron, is it weeks or very soon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a feel for the time scale.

Q Ron, do you have any comment on the formal filing of a complaint by the Democratic National Committee on the payment of Rogers Morton from the taxpayers funds rather than from the campaign funds?

MR. NESSEN: I checked with Phil Buchen this morning and he does have a draft of the letter that the FEC wanted spelling out in more detail Rogers' duties here. It is still in draft form and I think it will probably go to FEC on Monday or early next week. Other than to say that the President certainly will live up to the letter and spirit of the law and expects the other candidates to do the same, I don't have anything else to add at this point.

Q Ron, there is some speculation that it is the President's desire that the issue of the Panama Treaty not be dealt with until after the Florida primary, if not after the election. Is there any truth to this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand the connection. The Treaty has been under negotiation now for ten or twelve years and Mr. Bonker is the negotiator; has his instructions. I think they have been published by the State Department. I don't know what the connection would be.

Q There is no attempt to keep this under until after Florida primary?

MR. NESSEN: I never even heard the Florida primary discussed in the same breath.

Q Ron, every time you discuss the Morton appointment you talk about the President's commitment to obey the letter and the spirit of the law, and you always add parenthetically -- pointedly, perhaps -- you expect other candidates to do the same. Are you trying to get us to draw the conclusion that you feel Democratic Senators and the one Congressman who are running for their party's nomination are using taxpayer paid staff to advance their candidacy? Is that the charge you are making?

MR. NESSEN: I am not making any charge, and I am not drawing any inference. I am reflecting accurately what the President has said in just those words. I am sure that the reporters are going to look into whatever other similar matters there may be as they looked into Rogers'.

Q Quite apart from the payment to Secretary Morton, for an outline of his duties will we be able to see a copy of Mr. Buchen's letter to the FEC? Will you release it here?

MR. NESSEN: One way or the other, it will get out. (Laughter)

Q We know that, but will you do it the easy way or the hard way?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly, out of common courtesy, it needs to get to the FEC, and then we will make some arrangements to get it out.

Q Do you have a timetable yet on special messages going to the Hill? I am especially interested in the intelligence recommendation.

MR. NESSEN: There is a proposed timetable that has been prepared, and it is being reviewed and commented on and modified and so forth, but the process has reached the point where there is a tentative proposed timetable.

I can't give you the dates on this intelligence one or the others.

Q Do you expect any messages next week?

MR. NESSEN: No, I do not.

Q Could you give us some idea of the mechanism of the letters to the committees and which committees?

MR. NESSEN: It will vary. I think some will be Presidential speeches, some will be messages to Congress, and some will be forwarding legislation to Congress, and so forth.

Q In the President's interview with the New England editors, the President indicated his decision to veto common situs was based in part in reaction to the mail and letters that came in on that particular issue. Can he be swayed by the volume of letters or telegrams that come in on a particular issue in making a decision of that magnitude?

MR. NESSEN: The way I read his comments on that and the way I understand them was it was not that he took a count and the pro-veto people won in the mail and therefore he vetoed the bill. I think the point he was making was the volume of the mail and some of the things said in the mail persuaded him that if he signed the bill it would really only increase labor-management disputes rather than the goal of the legislation, which was to resolve labor-management disputes.

I don't think it was a question of just sheer mail count, but I think it was from that and from other conversations with other people he got the idea it was going to exacerbate labor-management relations.

But, you know, as he went on in that interview to say -- I think the question was how do you ever find out what the real people out around the world think -- and he mentioned one way of doing it was he got a weekly summary of mail and he also got a weekly sampling of the mail, so peoples' views as sent in by mail do get through to the President.

Q Ron, on that subject, this is the second time the President has mentioned the volume of that mail. Was he aware that 600,000 of those letters were form post-cards from the same organization?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure if they were or not. Were they?

Q You people have said they were from this very podium.

MR. NESSEN: Oh, no.

Q Carlson said that to us.

MR. NESSEN: Obviously, there were some form letters on both sides, but certainly the 600,000 letters which came in favor of the veto were not all form letters.

Q I understood a large majority of that number was designated as form post cards, and I wanted to know if the President was aware of that, because he seemed not to be.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, he gets a weekly compilation of the mail. In fact, I think the first time that I mentioned out here that some of the letters were form letters, that mention was from a memo to the President on all the mail, so it was mentioned to him in his weekly compilation, that some of the letters seemed to be form letters.

Q Can you tell us how many were actually, then, and get us a rundown on whether he really knew?

MR. NESSEN: This is a memo that was sent to the President on January 12 from Roland Elliott, who is the head of the mail section, and it is a summary of all the mail from 1975. It is a year-end summary. At the top of page 3 it says, "In addition to public concern over the power of the Federal Government there appears to be similar strong concern over the power of labor unions to control and alter American life patterns. This showed up most clearly in common situs mail, the heaviest subject mail of the year."

Then it goes on to break down pro and con, letters for and against common situs. It lists letters, and then it lists forms.

Q That was after the veto, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: This is a yearly compilation of all the mail in 1975.

Q And the numbers are?

MR. NESSEN: Letters in favor of signing the common situs picketing bill, 7,179; form letters in favor of signing the common situs picketing bill, 200; letters in favor of vetoing the common situs picketing bill, 47,459; form letters in favor of vetoing the bill, 598,693. (Laughter)

Q Were they all from the same person?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, Fran, I don't know. Call Roland Elliott. He is in charge of the mail office.

Q Ron, did the President have any comment on the latest Gallup Poll showing him nine points ahead of Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Have you thought through, as we get closer to the primaries, what your role will be as political spokesman for the President? Are you prepared to take questions on all political subjects? Will you refer some questions to the Ford Committee? How do you see your role as spokesman?

MR. NESSEN: I do now and plan to continue to refer as many political questions to Peter Kaye as I can.

Q You don't see yourself as a political spokesman for the President?

MR. NESSEN: Like in any job in this building, I think that line is difficult or really impossible to draw. It applies to people who write speeches, people who make schedules, people who do every job in this building. I think it is not possible to draw that line.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:07 P.M. EST)