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NEWS CONFERENCE

#458

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:31 A.M. EST

MARCH 16, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that much to tell you. Also, I have a cold and the Teacher of the Year Award is at noon. Let's see if we can finish by noon.

Q Where is she from, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Let me get to that in an orderly way.
(Laughter)

At 3 o'clock this afternoon, Ambassador Fred Dent, the President's Special Trade Representative, will hold a news conference in room 730 at 1800 G Street, Northwest, at which time he will announce the President's decision on the specialty steel import question and will answer questions. It is open for full press coverage. For some reason cameras and others who need electricity are requested to bring a 60-foot extension cord.

The Teacher of the Year Award -- now I know there is a certain amount of skepticism here about the Teacher of the Year Award. (Laughter) You know who she is, don't you? Mrs. Ruby Murchison, the 1976 Teacher of the Year. This program is sponsored by the Office of Education, jointly with Ladies Home Journal and the Encyclopedia Britannica along with the Council of Chief State School Officers.

I won't give you her age because she probably wouldn't like me to. She is from Fayetteville, North Carolina. She teaches at the Washington Drive Junior High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She is a teacher of language, arts and social studies, grade seven. She has taught at that school for 14 years. Her total experience as a teacher is 22 years. She has taught previously in other North Carolina schools.

Now just to show you that the skepticism is misplaced, here is a letter written to the Assistant Director of the Domestic Council on December 18, 1975. At that time there were four finalists in the Teacher of the Year contest. (Laughter)

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They were from Colorado, Georgia, Maryland and North Carolina. This lady who wrote this letter is Sue Hansford, the coordinator of the Teacher of the Year Award program. She writes in the third paragraph, "Our choice of a date for the White House ceremony is March 16, 1976. Our second and third choices are March 17 and March 18," et cetera. Anyhow, it was their request -- believe me it was -- that we do it today.

Q Are you saying the President doesn't use his incumbency before the primaries? We hadn't noticed that.

Q What is the date of that acceptance?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the letter back to them.

Q Do you know when it was sent?

MR. NESSEN: What, the letter back to them? I don't have the letter that accepts the particular date. Really, seriously, it is true the date was their suggestion.

Q Why are you so defensive?

MR. NESSEN: The first thing when I came out here today, everybody was hooting and laughing and saying, oh sure, that kind of thing.

Q Did they send you four finalists?

MR. NESSEN: We don't choose, no.

Q You don't choose the finalists?

MR. NESSEN: No, they choose them themselves. It says the National Teacher of the Year will be chosen by the Selection Committee on January 26. The name of the winner will be confidential until after the White House ceremony.

Q On the Fred Dent announcements, there will be no simultaneous announcement from the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is doing it for the President.

Q Did the President have any role?

MR. NESSEN: The President made the decision.

Q Is it not unusual for the President not to make this announcement and for the appropriate administrative officer --

MR. NESSEN: Fred Dent is the President's Special Trade Representative. He has been the one deeply involved. It is a complicated matter and he is the one with the expertise to explain to you the decision; that is, whether it was decided he would make the announcement.

Q In situations similar to this, is it not normal practice for the President to make the announcement and have the appropriate member of the Administration conduct the briefing?

MR. NESSEN: This is a Presidential decision that is being announced. The fact that Fred is announcing it and explaining it has no significance other than the fact he has the expertise to explain it and answer questions about it.

Q Does this mean the President will soon make a decision on beef imports?

MR. NESSEN: Is that a matter before the ITC?

Q It has been for years.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think they have submitted their recommendation yet. The only one I know is the shoe case. I don't know that the beef case has come through the ITC yet.

Q What about Wilson?

MR. NESSEN: The other event today is the credentials presentation by the new Ambassador from Australia.

The plans for the evening are that the President will, after he finishes his day's work, will go on up and spend the evening with Mrs. Ford, no doubt will keep an eye on television and will be in touch with some people from the PFC as the evening goes on and we will have a very light staff here in my office; namely, me. And at some point in the evening I would assume we would do the same thing we have on the previous Tuesday nights, which is to put out in a written form some reaction from the President as well as to keep you posted on the details of how he is spending the evening.

Q Is there any chance he would either go up to the PFC headquarters or make an appearance out here?

MR. NESSEN: No, there are no plans for that. The one thing he does plan to do is to put in a telephone call to the Lincoln Day Dinner in Kent County, Michigan, and speak to the dinner briefly over a loudspeaker set up at about 8:30 Washington time, and I will either get a copy of his remarks or listen in when he speaks and give you a report on how that goes. That is the only plan he has for the evening.

Q Will a tape be made and that tape be available to us here?

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't planned to, Russ.

Q What time is the speech?

MR. NESSEN: At 8:30. It is not a speech; it is remarks.

The other thing --

Q Ron, where is Kent County?

MR. NESSEN: It is where Grand Rapids is.

Q It is Lincoln Day?

MR. NESSEN: I asked about that, too, Les, and apparently they give themselves about two months' leeway on either side of the birthday to have this annual dinner.

Q Something to do with St. Patrick's?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is literally that they have this dinner one month on each side of Lincoln's birthday each year.

Q Who exactly is giving it? I don't think I heard you say exactly who was attending this dinner.

MR. NESSEN: It is the Kent County Republican organization.

Q Ron, you said the President will know most likely by the time he makes that telephone call what the results of the Illinois primary will be?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that is right.

Q Why don't you put that on the mult so we can all get the gist of his remarks or make some arrangements for us to get that?

MR. NESSEN: All right, we will put it on the mult and the PA at the same time. I don't think we will know the results in Illinois by 8:30 because you lose an hour and the polls close there at 7:00.

Q At 7:00 Eastern?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we could.

Q Cronkite will have a projection by 7:30.

Q He may even have one now. (Laughter)

Q In any event, if the President makes the call at 8:30 Eastern Time, it is likely he will know the results of the Illinois primary at that time.

MR. NESSEN: It is possible. We will pipe it through the loudspeaker and the mult.

Q That is about 8:30?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

The other thing, just to finish up on Illinois, I think some of you know the President made a series of phone calls to his various PFC phone banks out there yesterday, in Belleville, Moline, Danville, Chicago, Springfield, Peoria and Urbana. He began at 3:15 and it took him about 45 minutes to make the calls.

Basically, he just urged the workers to keep working right up through today and complimented them on what they have done so far, thanked them for it and told them not to let up.

As for the outlook in Illinois, I think it would be fair to say that the President believes that the race will be much closer than some of these estimates that are around. I think everyone here feels that Reagan will certainly get more than 40 percent of the vote. It is his home State, and he spent a good deal of time out there.

There is a somewhat peculiar situation there in which you can choose which primary to vote in, Democratic or Republican, and it is anticipated that the Walker-Howlett race will be attracting an unusually large number of voters and could possibly cut down the participation in the Republican side of the primary.

So, while the President thinks he will win, he thinks it will be nowhere near as large a margin as some people are talking about.

Q You don't mean to imply the Callaway disclosures or allegations had anything to do with the projections you are quoting today?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think, as Stu Spencer said yesterday--with somewhat more concrete evidence than I had when I said the same thing in the morning--was that the Callaway matter is not expected to have any effect on the primary results.

I think Stu said yesterday that based on phone calls and so forth up through yesterday, no effect was noticeable. But, that is unrelated to what I am saying today.

Q What happened at this routine meeting yesterday? Who attended it?

MR. NESSEN: The usual political people.

Q Who were they?

MR. NESSEN: The President, Stu Spencer, Rog Morton and Dick Cheney.

Q Was it a strategy session on Illinois?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was a routine meeting.

Q What is a routine meeting?

MR. NESSEN: A weekly meeting, sometimes more than once a week, to discuss various political matters.

Q Did they talk about a possible replacement for Callaway?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't attend the meeting, so I don't know, Rudy.

Q Is one expected to be named?

MR. NESSEN: For the time being, Stu is the acting chairman.

Q Do you have any idea today how long Callaway will be on the payroll?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that beyond what I said yesterday.

Q Is that a weekly meeting with this group?

MR. NESSEN: Once weekly, sometimes more than once a week.

Q Always on Monday?

MR. NESSEN: No, it varies.

Q Always in the Cabinet Room?

MR. NESSEN: Always in the Oval Office, as far as I know.

Q Have there been discussions of replacing Callaway?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. As the President said on Saturday, he was stepping aside temporarily until the matter was resolved.

Q Is anybody in the White House Counsel's Office keeping himself informed on the Callaway investigation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dave. I will have to check.

Q You don't know that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

Q Ron, you answered questions here for nearly 45 minutes yesterday in the Callaway affair and you couldn't tell us whether the Justice Department was looking into it and you were not so sure where the investigation stood. Do you have anything more to tell us today about Callaway?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, do you have a breakdown of Rogers Morton's campaign time and his other official duties?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't. I suggest you call Rog. I don't know if he keeps a time sheet, but he would probably have a pretty good idea of how he divides his time up.

Q I had the impression they were going to keep time sheets. I thought that was the understanding that the White House talked about.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I recall.

Q How was that whole thing finally resolved? The FEC kind of fell apart there. How does the White House view Morton's job?

MR. NESSEN: The same as always.

Q Is there an attempt to make sure he works 40 hours a week on noncampaign?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is he works more than 40 hours a week on noncampaign matters.

Q Has the President been in touch with Wilson?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Was he informed beforehand of the resignation?

MR. NESSEN: He was informed of the resignation.

Q Before?

MR. NESSEN: He was informed in a timely way.

Q Ron, how do you have the understanding he works more than 40 hours?

MR. NESSEN: Because I see him around here all the time.

Q Do you make any check? Does anybody make a check? You don't see him all the time, Ron. You have a lot of other things. How can you say, "My impression is he works 40 hours"? Have you ever checked?

MR. NESSEN: I don't keep a timecard on Rog.

Q Then how can you know?

MR. NESSEN: I said it is my impression.

Q Is this based on any scientific estimate? Has anybody checked, Ron? I think it is a legitimate question, I really do.

MR. NESSEN: Going back to John's question, I said, Les, my impression is he works far more than 40 hours a week on Government business and, as I say, I see him here usually before 7:00, when I get in, and he is normally here at 8:30 or 9:00, 9:30, or later some nights when I am here. That is where my impression comes from.

Q Does the White House have any official comment on Prime Minister Wilson's departure?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is considered to be an internal British political matter and not the subject for comment by the American Government.

Q Ron, how was the President informed? Was it by a member of the British Government or by Ambassador Armstrong?

MR. NESSEN: I won't go into, as always, how people get word of various things. He was notified in a timely way.

Q What do you mean "a timely way"? Was that before? I don't understand what you mean by timely.

MR. NESSEN: He was notified -- well, he was notified, period.

Q In diplomatic channels or personally?

MR. NESSEN: We never tell --

Q Yes, you do. That is not in the realm of secrecy.

Q The simple question is, was he notified in advance?

MR. NESSEN: The simple answer is he was notified in a timely way.

Q What do you mean by timely way?

MR. NESSEN: In a timely way.

Q Why is it such a big secret?

MR. NESSEN: Why is it such a big question?

Q It is rather important.

Q I think they advised everybody in Britain. I wonder how long in advance notice was given here.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, he was told in a timely way. (Laughter)

Q We don't understand the openness of this Administration.

Q That is a sphinx-like term. That leaves us all puzzled. What do you mean by timely way? This is a mysterious thing.

MR. NESSEN: At 10:30 tomorrow the Prime Minister of Ireland and Mrs. Cosgrave will be arriving on the South Lawn. There is open press coverage of that. There will be arrival ceremonies. It is a State visit.

Q There is no significance in the date, of course.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how this date was settled upon. (Laughter) I used to know how this date was arrived upon.

Q You would call it timely, though?

MR. NESSEN: It is a timely arrival.

The Prime Minister and the President will meet in the Oval Office after the arrival ceremony, and if you would like to take photos at the beginning of that, you may and we will obviously have a report on the meeting.

This coming weekend, I really can't tell you very much more than I did before, other than it is a down and back, all in one day, on Saturday. There is a relatively early departure, too, but a relatively early return.

Q What does that mean, 7:00 or 8:00?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. For the President, at least, a 7:00 or 7:30 departure and a 9:30 return, p.m.

The places and the events should be lined up well enough so that I could give them to you tomorrow, probably.

Q What about the California trip?

MR. NESSEN: That is still there.

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Muriel was asking about the California trip. That is the 26th, I guess, and that is still on, and it is still a fund-raising luncheon in San Francisco, a fund-raising dinner in Los Angeles and perhaps a stop on the way out or the way back.

Q On the dinner thing in Los Angeles, I presume we overnight in Los Angeles?

MR. NESSEN: I hope so.

Q What I want to know is what do we do the following day before we stop in Wisconsin on the way back? Will he be campaigning in the Los Angeles area?

MR. NESSEN: It hasn't been put together that well yet.

Q Will the Wisconsin stop possibly be on the way out?

MR. NESSEN: It could be.

Q Texas?

MR. NESSEN: Not this trip, I don't think.

Q What about Palm Springs, is that trip picking up again?

MR. NESSEN: No, only in the wishful thinking of the members of the staff and the press.

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Q Ron, do you have any response today to what the Congressional Budget Office said yesterday about the President?

MR. NESSEN: Well, this is a long report that they issued and we haven't really had time to go through all of it. Obviously, we are pleased that they found the economic recovery to be in progress and strong and that they agree with the President on that.

We disagree with -- at least after a preliminary look at it -- the Budget Office's evaluation of the impact of various policies on the economy. Other than that, it will take a little more reading before we get anything more definite.

Q Will the President be sending Congress a letter today asking for approval of the sale of C-130s to Egypt?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will have to check, Frank, and see.

Q We will be told, won't we, if he sends that letter?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure you will be, yes.

Q Has the White House been notified if the State Department has a report from former President Nixon on his visit to China?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it hasn't come yet.

Q You may have been asked this yesterday, but who has to clear Bo Callaway before he can return? Does he have to wait until the Senate hearings are over, or does he just have to wait until after the Justice Department investigation and others that may take place are completed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a specific answer to that, Fred, but I think what we said Saturday was when the matter was resolved.

Q My question is, is it resolved after those investigations or do you have to wait for the Senate hearings to be completed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will check.

Q Administration sources are being quoted as saying -- unidentified -- that he won't be back under any circumstances?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know why they would say that. The last official word was Saturday, which is he is stepping aside temporarily until the matter is resolved.

Q Will it be the President himself that will decide that the matter is or is not resolved?

MR. NESSEN: I think that would be fair to say, yes.

Q Something else you might have been asked yesterday, but is any inquiry underway on the question of whether Under Secretary Bill Campbell and Mr. Ashworth of the Agriculture Department might have conducted themselves in an improper manner as well?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, the various investigations are going ahead and will cover all the allegations.

Q Ron, does the President feel that the White House code of ethics that was promulgated here some months ago should and does apply also to the PFC officials?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I think the President on Saturday acted, and you know what his action was, and I think I would probably leave it right there for the time being.

Q Ron, what was the President's feeling after he made the remarks on revenue sharing before the mayors yesterday? Senator Hruska said this morning that the President said that he was asking Congress for the same level of funds as they have the previous year but that the mayors of another political party demanded more money from the Congress.

MR. NESSEN: The revenue sharing extension would not extend the revenue sharing at the current level but rather would raise it by \$150 million a year for five years. That is the President's proposal.

Q Ron, why was General Nickerson fired?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see, which one is that again? (Laughter) You mentioned it yesterday and I forgot which one he is.

Q The Credit Union.

MR. NESSEN: I have not found out whether he was fired and, if so, why.

Q Would it be possible to get an answer on that?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it, yes.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:57 A.M. EST)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:30 P.M. EST

MARCH 16, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President was in the study on the second floor of the White House. It is called the Study, and it is sort of the family room. He was watching TV and doing some paperwork at the same time. He was in shirt sleeves, white shirt, no tie.

The Signal Board put the call through to Richard Ogilvie, who is his campaign manager in Illinois, who was at the headquarters in Chicago. This is roughly how the conversation went.

Q Who made the call?

MR. NESSEN: The arrangements had been made ahead of time, and when I got over there I just asked the Signal Board to put the call through, and they placed it.

Q Can we say the President placed the call?

MR. NESSEN: The President called his headquarters. The President said, "Dick, how are you?" Ogilvie said something. The President said, "I feel great. It looks very good to me." Then Ogilvie gave him some numbers, apparently, and the President said, "That is great news. I am very encouraged. It is a great tribute to you, the Congressional delegation, the paid workers, and most important volunteer workers. They did a super job. We won't let them down. They couldn't have done any better. This is a stepping stone to North Carolina a week from now, and then Wisconsin."

Then there was a pause and Ogilvie talked to him and the President said to him, "Betty sends her love," and he said, "Today is Jack's birthday, and it is a great present for him." You know he campaigned out there. Parenthetically I am saying that.

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Q How old is he, 22?

MR. NESSEN: He is 24 today. That was it.

Q Was Jack there?

MR. NESSEN: No, Jack was not there. Mrs. Ford was in another room and as I was leaving, she came around and just chatted a little bit and that was it.

Q Today is his birthday?

MR. NESSEN: Today is Jack's 24th birthday. I think that really ought to be it for tonight. You know he usually stays up until about 11:30, but I think we will just put a lid on now.

Q What time is it going to go off tomorrow, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Regular time.

Bill, there is nothing special in the morning, is there?

Q You are not going to have any 6:30 announcement?

MR. ROBERTS: There is a staff meeting at 8:30.

Q Does the President share the feeling of some of his campaign officials, at least as reported, that Reagan ought to start thinking about getting out of the race now?

MR. NESSEN: I was over at the campaign headquarters tonight and I didn't hear anybody saying that over there, but as far as the President is concerned, that is a matter for Reagan to decide.

Q If you had gotten there earlier, you would have heard them say that.

MR. NESSEN: I missed that. The President feels that is a matter for Reagan to decide.

Q Ron, I got in on this late. The President talked to Ogilvie?

MR. NESSEN: Right. He said that he could hear -- I mean, there must have been a loudspeaker at the other end, and the President could hear the crowd reaction coming through the telephone, too.

Q Does the President think now that he has it sewed up?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but he doesn't feel that just after tonight. I think I said about three or four weeks ago that he expected to win before Kansas City, to have enough delegates before Kansas City to win the nomination, so this is not something I am saying as a result of Illinois.

Q Ron, Rogers Morton is saying that in fact Reagan, for the sake of the party, should throw his hat in the ring. You are saying the President doesn't feel that way. Who is running the operation here?

MR. NESSEN: First of all, I am not sure that is what Rog said. As far as the President is concerned, his view is that that is something for Reagan to decide.

Q But, I mean, who is in charge of the President's campaign here and who is going to go to Reagan's people, as in fact Morton did say today, and talk to them about withdrawal? Does the President not want that? Does he want that?

MR. NESSEN: It is up to Reagan.

Q Is he going to say to Morton tomorrow, "Don't do what you have been doing"?

MR. NESSEN: I am at a disadvantage. I don't know what Morton said. The President's view is whether Reagan stays in or gets out is something for Reagan to decide.

Q You are saying no one at the White House or the PFC would make the initial move, the initial move would come from Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: As far as the President is concerned, it is up to Reagan to decide.

Q You have said in the past that the President doesn't expect to win all the primaries in which he is competing head on with Reagan.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Are you in a position now to comment any further on that? Which ones does he expect to lose?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't talked to him lately about that subject. This was a few weeks ago. That was his view then. I will have to check it.

Q Would you like to amend it to say he does expect to now?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check and find out.

Q As far as you know, it is still his view?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard otherwise.

Q If I could return to a previous question, when I said, "Does the President think he has it sewed up now," and you said, "Yes," then you went on to say that you had said before that the President expected to have it sewed up. It is one thing to say that he expected to have enough delegates and another to say he has reached a point in time of actual victories --

MR. NESSEN: Obviously, Dick, it is not sewed up until he has the majority of the delegates, and he doesn't have the majority of the delegates, but by the time Kansas City comes, he expects to have enough delegates.

Q You are amending your earlier -- when you say, as you said earlier to Dick's question, "Does the President feel he has it sewed up now," you said, "yes" flatly.

MR. NESSEN: What I meant is I am saying the same tonight as I said several weeks ago, that he expects to have enough delegates before Kansas City. I have not said anything new tonight.

Q His reference to another real clincher --

MR. NESSEN: I heard that, but I don't know the exact context in which he said that. Anyhow, what I am saying tonight is what I said before, that he expects to have enough delegates before the convention in Kansas City.

Q Ron, his choice of words in that statement was a little bit puzzling because you don't really have one clincher after another, you have one clincher. (Laughter) Did he mean that this is it, that he has got it won now?

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

Q He said, "It is another clincher." This thing is going to be clinched to death before it is over.

Q I am serious. That is what I was trying to get at. What did he mean by that?

MR. NESSEN: Which primary is this, the fifth?

Q The fifth, and he has had a clincher in each one.

MR. NESSEN: He has 25 more clinchers to go. The only thing, we are not saying anything different tonight. You go along one at a time and by the time you get to August, you have enough delegates to win the nomination.

Q I believe at some point along the line you said he expects to have a first ballot victory. I assume that is what you mean when he says he will have a majority.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. That is going to be the real clincher, Russ. Kansas City will be the penultimate clincher.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 10:41 P.M. EST)