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

#462

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:00 NOON EST

MARCH 19, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: You saw the Tom Gates replacement ceremony -- I mean, the George Bush replacement, which was Tom Gates.

The only other thing of any real interest today is at 3:30 the President is having a reception for the National Newspaper Association. This is a group of editors and publishers of weekly newspapers and smaller daily newspapers. They come to Washington every year for a convention and they go around town and they have different briefings and so forth. So today they are coming to the White House.

First of all, there will be a short question and answer session in the East Room, which you are perfectly welcome to come to and bring your cameras if you care to, followed by a reception in the State Dining Room, which is a social event and is covered with the usual social event pool of writers.

That is all, I think --

Q The East Room thing will be on the mult?

MR. NESSEN: And on the loudspeaker, yes.

Q Ron, have you finished?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is all the events we have.

The outlook is really getting pretty dim for any advance text on North Carolina speeches. The President has another session today with the speechwriters and I would be very surprised if we had any speeches out in advance. The bible is being worked on.

Q We got it. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You see, that is efficiency.

So that is it.

MORE

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Q What is the Sunday schedule?

MR. NESSEN: Sunday schedule? I haven't heard of any schedule on Sunday at all.

Q Can you give us a topic for the Homemakers of America speech?

MR. NESSEN: John was the last one to take any careful look at it. I think that one is going to be started over again.

Q Are we likely to get any of these texts on the flight down in the morning?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible on the way down.

Q Ron, does this mean it is not a 6:00 a.m. release but release on delivery?

MR. NESSEN: Especially if we don't have it out by 6:00 a.m. (Laughter) If it doesn't get out before 6:00 a.m., we will just make it for immediate release if you would like it that way.

Q Are they expecting another shake-up in the speech department soon?

MR. NESSEN: Not at all.

Q So we don't have to hang around all evening waiting for it, do you want to decide at some point today when it will be released?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will decide right now there will not be an advance text out.

Q How many transcripts of various interviews will we have by that time?

MR. NESSEN: You know about the Bill Walker interview yesterday -- that was WSOC Charlotte. That is available now.

The President talked to some anchor people from Raleigh-Durham and from Greensboro this morning. They plan to use that at various times on Sunday so we would have that transcript on Monday morning.

The other was the North Carolina Editors yesterday; a transcript will be available at noon.

Q Ron, they are going to start using that from this interview tonight.

MR. NESSEN: That wasn't the proposal that came into the White House. It was that they would use it at various times on Sunday. I will check and see what their plans are.

Q Ron, I have a question. In the Bill Walker interview, Walker asked the President about the claims made after the Illinois primary. He said the President's aide used the word "clincher." Wasn't it the President that used the word?

MR. NESSEN: I think so.

The consumer price index is out today. I guess some of you have seen it and know that the consumer price index, basically the cost of living, went up one-tenth of one percent, which is the smallest increase in over four years.

Basically the White House feels that this is excellent news. Obviously, we welcome the news and feel that it is further evidence that the President's economic policy -- which is designed to bring about a healthy, sustained, long-term recovery, while at the same time not setting off a new round of inflation -- that these figures that came out today are further evidence that that economic policy is working.

At the same time, I think we all feel a sense of caution here that it will be difficult to have this small of an increase in the cost of living each month in the future.

Q Ron, is this one of the two other statistics that Greenspan said he was waiting for before he would revise the economic forecast?

MR. NESSEN: Well, there are others -- for instance, the new orders statistics are out today showing a 2.4 percent increase in new orders. That is also considered to be good economic news. A new gross national product figure is coming out soon. I know Alan wants to see that before he does any revision on the budget.

Q In the interviews today, yesterday and so forth, I didn't see them all. Did the President take a definitive stand on Callaway's future?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Did the President take a definitive stand on Callaway's future?

No, he said the situation had not changed from what it was on Saturday, which was that Bo has stepped aside temporarily until the matter is resolved.

Q Has the President said anything, to your knowledge, about any of the big labor contracts that are coming up this year and whether or not they pose any threat to economic recovery by virtue of perhaps inflationary wage demands? Have you heard him express himself on that?

MR. NESSEN: No, I have not, Walt.

Q Does he have anything you would like to convey on that by way of urging restraint on labor in those bargaining sessions?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know all that much about it. Let me look into it first.

Q Are you saying nothing has changed in the Callaway situation in the past few days even with the new allegations?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Is the President aware of all the new --

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by "all the new." There is a question, I understand, of some CAB waivers. That is the only new element I am aware of.

Q He is aware?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, I think NBC's report last night said Cheney had asked for Callaway's resignation and Callaway had asked for a week to clear or get his good name back. Did Cheney ask for Callaway's resignation?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I don't think I can describe the meeting in any more detail than I did yesterday, which was, Dick asked Bo to come in to discuss and to make sure that the matter was moving along as quickly as possible, and I just can't give any more detailed description of it than that.

Q Neither confirmation nor denial of that report?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to describe their meeting in any more detail.

Q What do you mean moving along as quickly as possible?

MR. NESSEN: The same things we talked about yesterday in answer to all the same questions, Helen. There is no change since yesterday so I don't have anything to say today.

Q You won't deny he has been asked to quit?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to describe that meeting in any more detail. The President's own words are good enough for me, which is the situation has not changed since Saturday.

Q So, then, that is a denial.

MR. NESSEN: Where did we start?

Q You said you are not going to say any more than what the President said on Saturday and what the President said on Saturday --

MR. NESSEN: And what the President said yesterday and what the President said today, which is that the situation has not changed. Bo has asked to, and it was agreed he would, step aside temporarily until the matter is resolved. That is where it stands.

Q If that is where it stands, then the report of yesterday that he had been asked to resign is incorrect.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to describe the Cheney meeting in any more detail and, as I say, the President's statement where it stands today is where it stands today.

Q If it hasn't changed since last Saturday, it is where it stood last Saturday and Bo had not been asked to resign last Saturday, so what you are saying --

MR. NESSEN: Is that what happened last Saturday was that Bo asked to step aside temporarily until the matter was resolved.

Q And nothing has been done beyond that?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Therefore, no one has asked him to resign?

MR. NESSEN: We can go around and around and around all day long. Nothing is new since yesterday, the day before yesterday, the day before that, since Saturday.

Q Why don't you say flatly Cheney did not ask him to resign?

MR. NESSEN: I said I was not going to describe in any more detail the Cheney meeting.

Q Are we incorrect, then, in our assumption that Cheney didn't ask for a resignation?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I am not going to tell any more about the Cheney meeting and the situation is as the President has stated it, which is that it is no different than it was Saturday.

Q Ron, please explain what you are saying here in connection with the report out yesterday that he has been asked to resign?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to respond to reports. I am going to tell you what the situation is, which is that it is the same as it was Saturday.

Q Now that we have a new Ambassador to China, have you been able to get in touch with the State Department and find out whether they have heard from Mr. Nixon?

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

Q Have you asked?

MR. NESSEN: I have asked and they have not.

Q Ron, Mr. Chirac was quoted yesterday as having criticized what he called "uncalled for American intervention" in French internal affairs, referring, I think, to speeches made by Mr. Kissinger and by the President himself on the possible entry of Communists in the French Government. Has the President been made aware in any way of this discontent of the French Government on that matter, and is he aware of the whole matter?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check for you.

Q Ron, on the trip tomorrow, will Rogers Morton and Stu Spencer be accompanying the President?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the manifest so I don't really know. I will check it.

Q It is fair to say Bo Callaway will not be accompanying him?

MR. NESSEN: That is fair to say.

Q Are there plans for Mr. Nixon to brief Mr. Gates before he goes on his assignment?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, there are no such plans, Phil.

Q Ron, is the President taking part in the negotiations going on or what is his feeling on the negotiations going on today in Bangkok on U.S. forces remaining in Thailand?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the situation. I will have to check it for you, but you will probably get it faster at either State or Defense.

Q Do you want to say anything here about those Republican Governors who have urged Reagan to withdraw from the Presidential race?

MR. NESSEN: Other than it is up to Reagan when he wants to withdraw from the race or if he wants to withdraw from the race.

Q Does the President think he will win in North Carolina?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he does.

Q On what basis?

MR. NESSEN: Based on his reception last week down there, some things that people have told him and just the general momentum that is behind his campaign.

Q Has he said whether it is going to be close, or whether it will be spread out a little more?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to tell. Reagan has spent a lot of time down there, I guess is still down there. He is hitting pretty hard. Certainly nobody here thinks the margin would be anywhere near what it was in Illinois, for instance. It will be considerably closer than that, is the general feeling. Again, it depends on the Ford campaign continuing its efforts in the way of phone calls and to get out the vote and that sort of thing.

Q What is the strategy for campaigning after this weekend and after next weekend in California? Has anything been decided by way of whether we are going to continue these weekend outings through April?

MR. NESSEN: There is no decision of what course the campaign will take after that.

Q Ron, the parens patriae bill that caused something of a stir here a couple of days ago was passed by the House late yesterday. They made two or three changes. The amendments were sponsored by Republicans and this would seem, on the surface at least, to meet most of the objections the President outlined in that letter. Do you have anything to say about that?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are right, some of the changes did meet at least some of the objections the President had to the bill in its House form. The problem is that it goes over to the Senate now where the Senate is considering it in quite a different form where it is only one part of about a six-part bill dealing with antitrust matters and so all I think I can say today is that, yes, the changes in the House meet some of the objections and that the President would wait and see what form it finally comes here in before making a decision on whether to sign it.

Q Ron, if you were standing out here, wouldn't you find it a bit difficult to reconcile the President's statement on Callaway with the fact that Cheney yesterday refused to state whether or not he discussed resignation with Callaway?

MR. NESSEN: Would I find it difficult to believe that?

Q To reconcile the President's statement with Cheney's refusal to say whether or not he discussed the question of resignation with Callaway?

MR. NESSEN: I imagine there were quite a number of items Dick declined to discuss for various reasons. I don't see the irreconcilability of saying nothing has changed since Saturday because it hasn't, with Dick and my decision not to give any great details about the Callaway meeting.

Q Last Saturday, one of the people in your camp said that among the options presented to Callaway, resignation was not one of the options presented to Callaway. Does that still stand?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, all I am going to say about the Callaway affair is that on Saturday he asked to be temporarily relieved of his duties until the matter is resolved. The President agreed to that and that was the case on Saturday, and every day since Saturday, including today, and it hasn't changed, and that is exactly where it stands.

Q Is he still on salary?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to check the PFC. I haven't heard otherwise.

Q Ron, why was General Nickerson fired and who in the White House turned down Senator Percy's offer to pay for the helicopter ride?

MR. NESSEN: Taking one at a time, I don't know whether he is a General --

Q Lieutenant General in the Marines.

MR. NESSEN: Mr. Nickerson sent a letter to the President on the 16th of March in which he submitted his resignation with deep regret from the job of Administrator of the National Credit Union Administration, and he went on to talk about what a great privilege it was to serve, et cetera. As far as I know, the President has not responded to this.

I would like to follow the normal procedure, which is if somebody does resign, we put out the letter of resignation at the same time that we put out the letter from the President, and since the President hasn't written back yet I can't do that.

Q You are not saying he was not fired?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard that he was fired. As far as I know, he wrote this letter on March 16 resigning with deep regret.

Q That is the reason you don't believe he was fired?

Q He was not asked to resign?

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing that he was fired. I have heard nothing to indicate that he was fired.

Q Senator McIntyre charged that he was being fired on the Floor of the Senate and was being replaced by an Illinois lobbyist. Could you check? Did anybody in the Administration ask that General Nickerson resign?

MR. NESSEN: I can check but his letter doesn't read that way.

Q He has been asking this question for three weeks and the man resigned on Tuesday.

MR. NESSEN: I have found Mr. Nickerson's letter which was dated March 16.

Q How about Senator Percy's money?

MR. NESSEN: I understand Larry is digging around on additional details.

Q Larry has tried but Larry has been unsuccessful as of 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon. I know he has tried, but he has been unsuccessful.

MR. NESSEN: Let's hear it for Larry. (Laughter)

Q He did, Ron. I just wondered who is stone-walling on this?

MR. NESSEN: He always does. I don't think this is an isolated case of trying. (Laughter) I think he has a record of trying.

Q Right, even a steer can try, Ron. (Laughter) Could we find out who --

MR. NESSEN: You are not equating Larry with a steer, are you? (Laughter)

Q No. Ron, who turned Percy down?

MR. NESSEN: I myself have not gotten into that because Larry has been trying, as you know. I will find out from Larry what the remaining areas of information are.

Q Thank you. I am very grateful.

MR. NESSEN: I will try to use my vast influence to pry that out.

Q When the Nickerson resignation is announced, and the President will probably accept it, will you put out the letters? Will you do that from now on? We didn't have letters from Gallegos or anyone else so that would be nice to have.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Could you please give us some reaction to Les Kinsolving and Sarah McClendon's appearance on the Tomorrow Show?

MR. NESSEN: When was that?

Q You didn't watch it last night?

MR. NESSEN: I did not.

Q You are unaware they made an appearance on nationwide television?

MR. NESSEN: If I had known that, I would have stayed up later.

Q Doesn't the White House videotape that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No, they don't. If I had known about it, maybe I could have asked them to.

Q Could you get Jones to give us a pool report?

MR. NESSEN: That is a good idea, Phil. Maybe Les could give us a pool report as a participant.

Q No comment. I think it would be inappropriate.

MR. NESSEN: Les, you owe it to the people.

Q You are asking -- I was very grateful that NBC was fair enough to give me an opportunity to answer charges raised before.

MR. NESSEN: What were the charges?

Q That I bait you. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Who ever raised a question like that?

Q Among others. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Did you refute it or rebut it?

Q I think it would be inappropriate for me to try to judge that, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Don't you think the people have a right to know whether you rebutted it or not? You are a public figure. The people are paying for their television sets and you don't expect them to pay that money and not get an answer, do you? What happened to the open clergy we have heard so much about?

Q Are you baiting him?

Q Ron, the President in the Miller interview again said that he could not say who the Democrats would nominate for President. Does this mean he is backing away from saying he thinks Humphrey is going to be the nominee?

MR. NESSEN: No, I will have to read that, but I know he still feels Humphrey will be the Democratic candidate.

Q Senator Griffin said today that Ford is going to veto the FEC bill that is going through Congress. Is that so?

MR. NESSEN: The President may have something to say on the FEC bill this afternoon when he talks to the National Newspaper Association. At the moment--I talked to him about it this morning--the statement he issued a while back at the time that it began to look as if Congress wasn't going to make the deadline, which urged Congress to pass a simple extension and then went on to say that he would veto any bill that confused the question or led to confusion or led to the possibility of litigation that would hold up the whole bill, that is his position today--that he would do that.

Q So, he is going to veto it because it does confuse the situation?

MR. NESSEN: If it does, he would veto it.

Q Is it his judgment that it will?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to tell because the thing is still going through the process and a lot of amendments are being raised and voted on. We will have to wait to see the final bill. His basic position is the American people, he thinks, want an election commission that will guarantee them a clean election this year, and Congress is fooling around. They were given one extension of time to pass this and have nearly run that out now.

I think Monday is the expiration date and unless Congress acts and passes a simple extension, because there doesn't appear to be time to do anything more complicated, the commission will expire and the people will be left to wonder why Congress has gone back to the old way and allowed a body which guaranteed a clean election to expire.

Q Except the President will have allowed it to expire by vetoing the continuation bill.

MR. NESSEN: It is not quite that simple, Carol, because if the bill leads to litigation, which delays further the ability of the commission to function, that has the same effect of killing the bill. The time to examine the election commission and the election law the President believes is next year after you have had an opportunity to observe it through one full election cycle and then make the changes necessary.

He feels there are shortcomings in the bill, too, but to start the game with one set of rules and then change the rules in the middle of the game he doesn't feel is proper. The time to change it is after the election.

Q Howard Norton wants to know if he can have his dollar back if the thing folds? (Laughter)

Q Ron, did you say the extension of the deadline was Monday? I thought it was Saturday.

MR. NESSEN: Today is the 19th, tomorrow is the 20th, Monday is the 22nd. That is the deadline.

Q As it stands now, does he see objectionable features in the bill?

MR. NESSEN: I frankly don't know where the bill stands because so many amendments have been offered and I don't know which ones have been approved or disapproved. The only way to get it done in time is a simple extension.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:25 P.M. EST)