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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:00 NOON EDT

MAY 5, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think you talked to most of the members who were at the Republican Leadership meeting this morning. Then you saw the Goodwill Worker of the Year and the ethnic leaders.

The President will be posing with the 1949 class of the Jaycees Ten Outstanding Young Men of America in the Rose Garden in about a half hour, and then he will have lunch with them in the Residence.

You know about the signing ceremony for the Highway Act this afternoon. It is at 3:00. I think Margaret has provided you with the background and the information.

Q Do you have the veto today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we are going to have any other legislative action today.

That is about it for announcements.

Q Ron, I understand that the President will make himself available at this next thing.

MR. NESSEN: I think at some point today, Phil, you will have an opportunity to talk to the President about his reaction.

Q Do you know when, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think it will be sometime in the afternoon hours.

Q Isn't it the 12:30 event?

MR. NESSEN: It may be that he will wander over and talk at that sometime.

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Q If he wanders over, three people hear him and you strain and struggle. Why doesn't he do it on a basis where we can all hear?

MR. NESSEN: I think it will be possible to hear what he says, Helen.

Q Did the President meet with Morton this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he did.

Q What was discussed?

MR. NESSEN: It was not a lengthy meeting, and it was not really basically a meeting where any decisions were made. It was just a very brief review of where things stand and what the outlook is.

Q What do the President and his campaign manager think the President has been doing wrong?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that the big problem is that the President and his campaign have not apparently adequately explained or gotten across the genuine accomplishments of this President.

Q You know he has, Ron.

Q Let him finish, please.

MR. NESSEN: The accomplishments as the President sees them which should win for him the nomination, and he believes will win for him the nomination, and should win for him the election in November, are really three.

They are, number one, restoring the economy after its very deep recession, raising unemployment to the highest ever in history and reducing inflation substantially from the level he found it when he took office, so that is one area of accomplishment which he feels -- and his campaign advisers feel -- has not adequately been gotten across to the voters.

The second area is accomplishments in the field of foreign affairs, the biggest accomplishment being that for the first time in I don't know how many elections a President can go before the public and say we are at peace and the outlook for the future is for continued peace. That aspect of what the President believes is an outstanding success of his Administration has not been, he feels, adequately portrayed and gotten across to the voters.

The third aspect is when you look back at the conditions, the attitude of the public toward its President and the White House and the institutions of Government in August of 1974, the President believes that the third outstanding accomplishment of his Administration has been the restoration of trust, of confidence, of honesty to the Presidency and to the White House.

It is clear, I think, that the President feels that those accomplishments of his Administration have not been portrayed and gotten across fully and adequately to the voters. He really believes that what needs to be done beginning now is to make a better case for this President in the weeks and months ahead.

Q How does he plan to do that?

MR. NESSEN: I think as Rog said last night, the campaign is going to be reviewed. The fact is that the campaign strategy has been reviewed on a fairly continuous basis since the beginning, but there will be a study of strategy, of things like the President's schedule, of the kind of activities he will take part in on his campaign trips, the issues he will discuss and the kinds and places of his speeches. All those things are going to be reviewed now.

Q Is he setting kind of a deadline for when he wants answers to this?

MR. NESSEN: No, because I don't think it is something where Rog is going to come in with a paper and say "Here are the answers." It is a continuing process that will examine each of these areas, and others, and come up with recommended changes, if necessary.

Q Ron, I have been on every campaign trip, and the three things you said the President should now begin to emphasize he has indeed emphasized all the way along.

MR. NESSEN: I did not say he should begin to emphasize, I said these have not been adequately, somehow, portrayed to the American people, and I think some attention has been diverted to other issues which in a sense are not-- well, I don't know how to put it. I know other people I have heard use the expression "phony issues," and that kind of thing, but there has been some attention diverted into other issues.

You are right, he has talked about these issues in each place, but the need is to get the case over to the voters better.

Q Has he referred to these other issues as phony issues?

Q Who used the word "phony"?

MR. NESSEN: The President does not use that word, has not used that word. Some others involved in the campaign have.

Q Are you speaking of the Panama Canal?

MR. NESSEN: Things like that, yes.

Q Can I ask if the President is going to stop addressing himself to what we will call the Reagan issues of defense and the Panama Canal? Is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: It is clear people's concern about their national defense and their foreign policy are legitimate issues, and so I would not expect that it is going to be a cut-off in talking about them. I am just saying that these are the reasons why the President believes he should be and will be nominated and he is going -- and his campaign is going -- to make a greater effort to get that across to the voters.

Q What are some of the other phony issues that you would describe?

MR. NESSEN: I think Saul suggested the Panama Canal and the way it has been discussed, and some of the other issues in the defense area in the manner they have been discussed strike some people in the campaign as being what they refer to as phony issues.

Q Let's be specific about it. What issues?

MR. NESSEN: The number one and number two issues, so-called issues, that kind of thing.

Q Ron, on point number three, August 1974, confidence, trust, et cetera, does that mean you feel Mr. Nixon's shadow is still dogging the President?

MR. NESSEN: Quite the opposite. I think, Ralph, as I say, one of the accomplishments has been to restore honesty, confidence and integrity to the White House.

Q I am talking about what you call the President's failure to make this point adequate. Does that mean the voters are still preoccupied by Mr. Nixon in the aftermath of Watergate?

MR. NESSEN: I would not put it that way. I would say these are the three areas in which the President believes his accomplishments have not been adequately gotten across.

Q That is exactly the point I am bringing up for you to comment on, if you care to.

MR. NESSEN: I don't really have anything to say.

Q Would you say the statement yesterday on the Panama Canal, was that in any way prompted by the White House or cleared by the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think Senator Goldwater is a person who takes readily to prompting or cueing by anybody.

Q Could you please answer directly? Do you know it was not? I have been informed that there have been some consultations from White House people.

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I know.

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Q Ron, what you are saying -- I don't mean to be cute -- but it is not the message but medium that is the trouble with the President getting his message over. Could you be a little more specific on that? Is he thinking of doing away with the local Q and A forums to some extent, the local press conferences, and pay more attention to formal speeches? Could you talk about the form of the campaign, what is under study?

MR. NESSEN: Some of the things under study, Dick, as I suggested, are things like the President's schedule and the kinds of activities and the issues he is to discuss and the formats he is to use and the speeches and so forth. All these matters are under study.

I don't want to sound like this is some emergency study that was launched overnight, because the campaign has been, from the beginning, assessed and reassessed on a daily basis.

Q There is some criticism within the President's advisers of this form of his public Q and A forums, isn't there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, I have not heard that here.

Q Ron, should we anticipate fewer public forums in the weeks ahead?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, Russ, there has not been any change made, but all these matters that I listed and others are under study and review.

Q And one other question -- in reference to your earlier comments, should we anticipate less reaction to what Reagan says and more you might call it Presidential offensive in terms of campaign speeches?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President will explain what he believes have been his accomplishments and why he believes those accomplishments add up to a record for a President that he feels should be nominated and elected.

Q Ron, what does the President feel he will do in Nebraska?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know actually what the outlook is in Nebraska. That is something you probably should talk to the PFC about, but let me just say this. We did not get around to it actually. The President feels this way very firmly and with a great deal of confidence. He feels that he is going to win the nomination, he is going to win it on the first ballot in Kansas City, and he feels that the party will then unite behind him, that he will attract Independent and Democratic voters in November and that he will win the election in November. He has a strong feeling --

Q Why is he going to attract these Independents and Democrats in November when he can't attract them now? Reagan seems to be the only person attracting them in the primaries.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that that is true. I think Brokaw was telling me there was a 50-50 split of crossover votes in Indiana, if I am not mistaken.

Q What does the President think was the primary reason for his defeat in Indiana, where he had been ahead in the popularity polls aside from this business, which is very nebulous, of making the case.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it is very nebulous, Helen.

Q Does he think the Reagan campaign was stronger? Does he think Kissinger was an albatross? Are there any specifics?

MR. NESSEN: Obviously there are a large number of factors that go into an election and a decision in an election. It is, after all, only the morning after and there has not been time to sit down and to do a very detailed analysis of what the factors were. One of the factors the President believes and his advisers believe is that the campaign has not gotten across these genuine accomplishments.

Q Ron, if I understand you, are you saying the President feels Ronald Reagan has been allowed too much to control the issues and he is trying to size back the initiative now?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is not right. To analyze the Indiana primary in great detail, it is too soon really, but in general the President feels that he has not gotten across to the voters adequately this record of accomplishment.

Q Does he believe that he has not been able to articulate this program or that his aides in the campaign organization have not been?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it has been broken out like that, Phil.

Q Does he still believe he is the front runner?

MR. NESSEN: He believes very firmly and very confidently that he will win the nomination on the first ballot in Kansas City and win the election in November.

Q How many delegates does he think he has now?

MR. NESSEN: I think the wire services have added them up and then, of course, you have the uncommitted delegates and the expression "uncommitted" I don't really think properly reflects the true inclination of most of those delegates who are labeled "uncommitted. Now, what the breakdown actually is among those called "uncommitted" you need to talk to the PFC about because I am not enough of an expert on how they break down.

Q Ron, about 130 of those are from New York and 100 plus are from Pennsylvania. I want to know if the President feels he needs those to win the first ballot nomination or if he is going to win it without those so-called uncommitted?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the term "uncommitted" does not adequately or properly reflect their true leanings and how they will vote in Kansas City. How many of them go which way you have to check with the PFC.

Q Ron, I am asking the question. Can he win without them on the first ballot?

MR. NESSEN: I think "uncommitted" does not properly indicate how they will vote on the first ballot.

Q The President answered that question Saturday because I asked him and he said yes.

MR. NESSEN: You have to go to the PFC to find out how the so-called uncommitted stand on the first ballot.

Q Ron, Ronald Reagan has urged the President not to sign the legislation reconstituting the FEC. Will the President accept that advice?

MR. NESSEN: The FEC legislation is not here yet and I am told it will either come later today or perhaps after that, but the President has not made up his mind yet on the FEC legislation.

Q What is holding up the veto on the foreign aid bill?

MR. NESSEN: Writing a proper statement explaining his reasons.

Q When do you expect to have it?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime in the next couple of days.

Q Ron, does the study in the White House have a --

MR. NESSEN: Wait, the study is being conducted by the campaign.

Q Well, does this study involve possible changes in personnel as well as tactics and strategy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans to change personnel, Ralph.

Q Ron, this morning John Tower said he removed himself for consideration as an at large delegate from Texas due to division within the party in Texas. The President has already announced he will be his floor manager and I am not well enough acquainted with the rules of the convention to know whether he can be floor manager without being a delegate or not.

MR. NESSEN: You have got me. I don't know that either, Margaret.

Q Will the President now look for another floor manager?

MR. NESSEN: Let me see how the first floor manager question is resolved. I don't know the answer to that.

Q Ron, in San Antonio, Texas last week you specifically singled out the American Conservative Union as one of those independent organizations conducting a campaign on behalf of Mr. Reagan, and you said they are spending a lot of money on Reagan's campaign but not reporting to the Federal Election Commission.

James Roberts, who is the Executive Director of this organization, flatly denies that and says the organization has been filing reports with the Commission and will continue to do so and calls on you to retract your remarks. What evidence did you have to make a serious charge like this and if you had known, why should you retract your remarks?

MR. NESSEN: The evidence is contained in the publication of the American Conservative Union.

Q Yes, I am the editor of it.

MR. NESSEN: Then you know the evidence, then. I guess it is contained on page -- I don't have a page number but it talks about that in the March 9 Florida primary, "The independent campaign also included a mass mailing of over 50,000 Human Event supplements on Reagan, the aid of almost the entire ACU staff for a full week of phone canvassing, literature distribution and election, get-out-the vote activities.

In the final tally, the ACU ran 33 major newspaper ads and 882 radio spots in North Carolina cities. These advertisements ran in 15 counties and Reagan won 13 of them.

Finally, the Carolina primary saw a substantial independent campaign in Reagan's behalf coordinated by the youthful attorney, Joseph Beardhead, of the North Carolina Conservative Union. This independent effort, permitted under the Supreme Court campaigning ruling, ran 33 newspaper ads and more than 800 radio spots in North Carolina cities, hammering on the differences between Reagan and Mr. Ford on foreign and domestic policies. So, I think that pretty well spells out the kind of spending I was talking about.

Q Your charge was ACU has not filed with the Federal Election Commission. Mr. Roberts points out what ACU did in Florida, North Carolina, Illinois and Wisconsin, and all these expenditures are listed in the April 10 filing. It is there on record. What was your evidence saying ACU did not file? That is a serious charge.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is these so-called independent organizations are not required to file monthly reports. They are required to file quarterly and the next filing is July 10, which will be after the primary season.

Q North Carolina and Florida reports have already been filed and were in the April 10 filing. What was your evidence to make the charge that ACU was not filing?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it is not required that these so-called independent organizations file monthly reports as the candidates and their official campaigns are and any financial report filed will be filed now after the primary season is over.

Q So, you are saying there is nothing illegal about what they do?

MR. NESSEN: I never, never said anything illegal.

Q You were not trying to suggest it was illegal?

MR. NESSEN: Never.

Q Was it proper?

MR. NESSEN: That is not for me to judge.

Q Did you misspeak yourself, then?

MR. NESSEN: No, I did not.

Q Ron, did the President suggest to Senator Baker that he campaign the next two weeks in Tennessee for him?

MR. NESSEN: Did the President suggest to Senator Baker --

Q -- to Senator Baker that he campaign the next two weeks for him.

MR. NESSEN: You mean at this meeting this morning? Senator Baker was not at the meeting this morning.

Q This was decided before the meeting this morning.

MR. NESSEN: I really am not sure, but the PFC has a program where Members of Congress who support the President do go out and campaign for him, and so I would suggest you ask the PFC who some of the so-called advocates are in Tennessee.

Q Ron, I just want to see if I can get specific one last time here. What States are you saying ACU spent money in and did not file a report on the expenditures specifically?

MR. NESSEN: As you say, you are the editor of the publication and you have laid it out in your own publication, so I don't know why I need to read back to you from your own publication.

Q It has been filed for those States, Ron, April 10 filing. It is already on record.

MR. NESSEN: And the next filing was after the primary season, as I understand it. July 10 is the next required filing.

Q What specific States are you saying --

MR. NESSEN: Whatever primary States the so-called independent organizations have spent money in will not be reported until after the primary season is over.

Q Ron, does the President believe Secretary Kissinger's Lusaka statement hurt him and apparently we reported in the press that Rogers Morton and others were upset by that.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, foreign policy is clearly one of the plusses for the President in the primary season because the ultimate test of the success of a foreign policy is whether you are at peace or not, and this country is at peace, which is something a President has not been able to say for a long time.

Now, the fact of the matter is that foreign policy, the President believes, should not in any way be changed or shaped or modified to meet the needs of some kind of domestic primary in this State or that State or for picking up votes from this group or that group. The foreign policy of the United States over the years has traditionally and generally been supported on a bipartisan basis and the President feels that foreign policy and the goals of foreign policy in keeping the peace are too important to be affected or changed in any way because of some supposed short-term or temporary benefit in any State, and the President is responsible, as no other candidate is, for conducting the day-by-day foreign policy of the United States.

He is not going to conduct foreign policy with one eye on the ballot box. He is going to conduct foreign policy for the good of the nation in the long-term. Now, certainly the Russians and other adversaries overseas are not modifying their foreign policy for any political reasons and the United States won't, either.

Q Let me ask you a follow-up on Lusaka. Does he believe that is a good thing --

MR. NESSEN: The President does not believe, as I say, that his foreign policy ought to be modified or changed in any way for any short-term, temporary benefit in a primary State.

Q Ron, is the President concerned that because of the crossover votes he may lose his home State of Michigan.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the President is very, very firmly confident that he will win the nomination on the first ballot and win the election.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:30 P.M. EDT)