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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. EDT

AUGUST 3, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You have seen the arrival ceremony for President Kekkonen of Finland. There will be a State Dinner this evening for the President and there will be the normal coverage of the arrivals, the toasts and the entertainment.

There will be a written readout on the meeting at about 3 o'clock this afternoon.

The other thing is that I wanted to mention to you that after this briefing we can hand out to you a message the President is sending to Congress containing his proposed legislation for dealing with the so-called questionable corporate payments overseas, and this will be embargoed for 2:30, at which time Secretary Richardson will have a briefing on the legislation over at the Commerce Department.

Q That is 2:15, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The embargo or the briefing?

Q The briefing.

MR. NESSEN: Let's check. We were told 2:30, but I will check and tell you right here before we are finished.

That is all the announcements I have to make.

Q Is there a time on Philadelphia yet? Departure, I mean?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I mentioned --

Q I was not here yesterday. I was told that perfect attendance is not required.

MR. NESSEN: Or even desirable.

Q That is why you have to repeat so often.

MR. NESSEN: I think there will be a tentative take-off time of around 2:30 Sunday afternoon, Jim, and a tentative return time around 7:25 or 7:30.

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Q Are those Presidential times or press times?

MR. NESSEN: Those are Presidential times.

Q Has the President ordered any investigation of these deaths in Pennsylvania?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding, Helen, is that the health authorities in Pennsylvania have requested that the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta involve itself, and it has, but there has been no direct White House involvement. The health officials called HEW and called the CDC directly.

Q Ron, I inquired of your office earlier and I wonder if you have perhaps had a chance to check on this. Is there any information that the President made a call to Colorado last night?

MR. NESSEN: No. I know of the question and the phone records have been searched and there is no record of any phone call to Colorado by the President.

Q Would someone have called for him?

MR. NESSEN: There was no record of that either.

Q Did anybody ask the President to call?

MR. NESSEN: I asked the President and I checked the phone records and there was no record of a call.

Q Today is the deadline for the Capitol Hill suggestions for nominees for the Vice Presidency.

MR. NESSEN: I know.

Q Do you have them?

MR. NESSEN: Senator Scott and Congressman Rhodes have already sent some over to the President and I don't know what the precise plans are for bringing the remainder in, but I will check for you.

Q Ron, along that line, a group of Republicans from the Northeastern States reputedly have given the President a list of eight suggestions for Vice President, one of whom is Vice President Rockefeller. Does the White House have any comment on that list?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't think we will have any comment on any of these suggestions that will be coming in, Jim.

Q Do you want to tell us what step two is now on the Vice Presidential selection process?

MR. NESSEN: Not yet.

Q When would you like to tell us about the next step?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you about it when we get a little closer to it.

Q At an appropriate time?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Are there more steps?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, there are more steps.

Q Are Scott and Rhodes coming over to the White House this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: They are not on the schedule that I know of for today.

You are right about the Richardson briefing. It is 2:15.

Q If the President gets the additional names from Scott and Rhodes, they will be sent over by courier, is that the idea?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check to find out what the plan is for getting that.

Q Ron, is the President considering possible running mates who have said they don't want to be considered?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Ted, I will tell you. I think since the process is underway of consulting and receiving opinions and suggestions, that I think I indicated the other day I just didn't want to stand up each day and say he is in or he is out or he is under consideration or he is not. I just think we are too far along to get into that.

Q Has he not made up his mind yet?

MR. NESSEN: No. I have said before, Helen, that he has certainly not made up his mind yet and I don't anticipate him making up his mind for a while.

Q Ron, you will give us a tally on this eventually, right?

MR. NESSEN: Wrong.

Q A few days before the Convention?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You mean that all this great testing of people and delegates and all that, we won't know what they said?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I said yesterday, Sarah -- I think you were not here -- but as Jim said, perfect attendance is not required.

Q Thank you.

MR. NESSEN: The purpose of this is to provide advice and suggestions to the President for his own private decision on who he wants for his running mate.

Q I am well aware you said this since Saturday, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: It is not designed to be a public opinion poll meant for publication. It is strictly for the President's advice.

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Q I am well aware that you have said this, but the point I am trying to bring out here with some emphasis is that the people have a right to know. This is kind of a new process of picking a Vice President and this is, at last, some input on the part of the people or their representatives.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Why would it not be a good thing to be really democratic about this and let the public know what the people's representatives have said?

MR. NESSEN: I think, as I said yesterday, the purpose of it is to provide suggestions and advice to the President as he makes his choice and it is not meant as a public polling device.

Q Not speaking now of this poll, but rather, speaking of the stages in the process the President is going through, why do we have to get our information from delegates to the members of the Mississippi delegation to the Republican Convention rather than from the President's Press Secretary?

MR. NESSEN: We had planned all along to announce the letter and process on Saturday. The President, in the course of talking, first of all, to the Pennsylvania delegation Friday night, I guess it was, and then to the Mississippi delegation on Saturday, described to them in his private meetings, the process and some of them passed on the information, but our intention all along was to announce the process on Saturday.

Q Right. My question goes to the matter of your timing and acumen. You knew the President was going to talk to the Pennsylvania delegation on that Friday night, I guess it was, and you knew he was going to Mississippi on Saturday. Didn't you have some concern, trepidation, or whatever, that he might indeed put this out and it might leak out before your carefully arranged scenario and, you know, where is your flexibility here? Why don't you put the stuff out first?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim, how to answer that question.

Q Ron, can you respond to some of the criticism from the Reagan camp that by not disclosing his choice for a running mate that the President is not being as open and honest with the delegates and prospective voters as Reagan is by announcing who he would run with?

MR. NESSEN: The process of selecting a Vice Presidential running mate has several stages to it as you know, we have all discussed it here. The stage that the President is in now is seeking the advice and opinion and suggestions of all the delegates and alternates, all the Republican Members of Congress, all the officers of the RNC through the State level, and others.

The President feels that that is a good method of consulting widely and hearing who the leaders of the Republican Party want to represent them as a Vice President and he believes that is a good process.

Q The President said several times himself that he knows the people under consideration. He knows their records. He does not have to go through the sort of thing that Carter did to find a running mate and you said the poll that is being taken is not a public opinion poll.

MR. NESSEN: I would not even call it a poll, Rudy.

Q How can we conclude anything other than that this is just a delaying tactic to keep people off his back a little while?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard anybody raise that until you did. I know what the President's purpose is and I know how this fits into his process and I know how important he feels it is to get the leaders and representatives of Republicans to indicate who they would like to be their --

Q Ron, did the President promise the Mississippi leaders that he would not pick a liberal as a running mate?

MR. NESSEN: I think he said in exactly the words that he has used publicly and that is that the criteria are, number one, the person he picks will have to be totally capable of assuming the Presidency; and secondly, he said to the Mississippi delegates that the person would be compatible with him on a personal basis and in terms of his major views on the issues.

I heard it and I didn't hear any difference in the words he used than the words he used that very same day in talking publicly to reporters.

Q Can I pursue my question, or follow up on my question?

Q Did you listen in on the conversations with Reed on the telephone, and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: I heard his two-hour session with the Mississippi delegation.

Q I don't think you really responded to my question. The Reagan people, in effect, are saying that the President is not being as honest as their candidate is by declining to name his choice ahead of the Convention. In effect, the process that you are describing could have been begun a month ago very easily.

The President still could have come out and said who it was that he was picking on the basis of this advice, or whatever. You have repeatedly declined to say that the President would even be bound by the suggestions that he got. How do you respond to the Reagan criticism?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Dick. I don't respond, but rather I tell you the process the President intend to follow and why.

Q Ron, could I ask you this: I gather that your statement that the results of this survey are not going to be made public applies not only prior to the Convention and during the Convention, but after the Convention. In other words, there are no plans to make these results public at any time; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: But Jim, I think if you think of this as some kind of poll or some kind of contest or --

Q I don't know what you call it.

MR. NESSEN: -- like the voting for the All Star Game, it is not that at all. It is an effort by the President to get to all these categories of people and ask their advice.

Q Right. I will call it an effort.

MR. NESSEN: He calls it consultation.

Q The results of the consultation effort will not ever be made public; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, there is no intention to.

Q Then, the people who are taking part in the consultation effort will never know whether the person who had the highest number of mentions or the second highest, or at least a large number, was actually the person the President chose; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I think, based on what I have said over the last few days, which is that it is not a poll, it is not a contest, it is not a voting for the All Star Game, it is to seek suggestions from the leading Republicans.

Q They are never going to know whether the person with the largest number of suggestions or how many -- they are never going to know how many suggestion- the person he finally picks had; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I think that follows from what we have said.

Q Then, how are they ever going to know that they had any part in this process at all, that it was not a complete charade? They might pick someone who got no suggestions at all, or very few.

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MR. NESSEN: As I told Bob Pierpoint on Saturday when he raised very much the same issue, I know of no justification to question the President's integrity to the degree that that question, I think, does.

Q Ron, what will become of these things when they come in? Are you going to have somebody sit and compile them, and put them on a list and put down the numbers for various candidates?

MR. NESSEN: I do not know what exact form a chart or graph will take, but --

Q Is he going to read them and add them up and throw them away or what?

MR. NESSEN: Burn them.

Let me find out exactly what his involvement will be, but they will certainly be compiled.

Q Ron, just what is he looking for? Does he want to see how broad some people's support is within different layers of the Party? Is he looking for names that he has not thought of himself?

MR. NESSEN: I think both of those certainly as well as other reasons.

Q What other reasons?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think the word he uses which is "consulting" is a good description, I think, to, as you say, have names brought to his attention which he might not otherwise have thought of, to get the degree of support that one possibility has over another, and these will also -- I mean, if the pattern is at all similar to the pattern at the time that he asked for suggestions when he named his present Vice President, people don't just turn in a list of five names.

Based on the meetings I have sat on lately at which people offer suggestions, they offer not only names, but they offer ideas of the general direction the President ought to go in, what role the Vice President ought to play in the campaign, and in the Administration and so forth.

So, it is more than just getting a list of five names and adding them up.

Q Ron, would you agree with the statement that in this consultation the President is looking for the sense of his Party with respect to a Vice Presidential choice?

MR. NESSEN: Among other things. I would think that would be one purpose of it.

Q How, then, will his party know whether he followed its sense?

MR. NESSEN: Well, again, I think that the President, of course, as I said the other day, will make the final choice after having been consulted very widely and having consulted very widely with the member delegates of his party.

Q It is conceivable that he will not follow the party's sense?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think if you start from where I think you are starting from, which is that somehow the President is bound and determined to, as Tom said, add these up and throw them away and ignore them, I think, perhaps, you could reach that conclusion or reach the point where you could ask that question.

If you start from the point where I have seen the President starting from and from the point where I have seen him consulting verbally with people who come in, and if you start from the point where I know he is vitally interested in knowing what this cross section of people thinks, then I think you get to a different conclusion, which is why I think we probably are having trouble seeing eye to eye on the process.

Q I just wanted to ask you, is it not the case, then, that you and the President in effect are asking the Republican Party and the reporters and anybody else who is interested to take this on faith on his and your say-so?

MR. NESSEN: Again, Jim, I think we start from two different perspectives here. I think you perhaps are starting from the perspective of what is wrong with this thing, where is the catch here, where is the beginning?. I am starting from the point of view of having seen the President sit down with people and listen to them and see the people offer their ideas in a very serious and constructive way, because they believe that this person or that person or this direction or that direction is the best for the party to take this year.

Q You have seen that and we have not. Let me just ask you: Is there any way at all, any one thing whereby the Republican Party will ever know what the results of this consultation were?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in the sense of a tabulation of ---

Q I don't care, anything at all.

MR. NESSEN: -- the winner was so and so with so many votes and on down through a list like that?

Q Anything at all.

MR. NESSEN: I do not anticipate, as I said all along, that we would put that out because the purpose of it is to provide advisory consultation or ideas to the President.

Q Ron, quite apart from the survey, a number of Mississippi delegates --

Q Did anybody from the HEW talk to the President yesterday about these deaths in Pennsylvania?

MR. NESSEN: I don't believe that the HEW people have talked directly to the President. I think the Domestic Council has made some inquiries and requested it be kept advised on the findings of the CDC.

Q What was the President told yesterday about that matter, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think what he was told was precisely what has been published, which is that there have been these deaths in Pennsylvania, that the State health authorities have asked the CDC to help find the cause and that is really about all that is known at the moment.

Q Ron, was there any check on whether or not it is safe for the President -- has anybody even asked whether it is safe for the President to go to Philadelphia after the American Legionnaires suffered their deaths and so on? Did anybody even bother to check whether it is safe for him to go?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that question has come up, Dick.

Q I am not aware that it has come up, actually.

Q Ron, they are having a pretty big meeting up there right now.

Q Do you think with 18 people dead after attending a convention in that same city that this matter is going to be looked into before --

MR. NESSEN: Well, the matter is being looked into by the people who are best qualified to look into it.

Q No, with respect to whether it is safe for the President to go.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think you can make that determination and I don't want to even leave the impression that that is a burning, active issue at the moment. I mean, the President is going to Philadelphia.

Q He is not going to eat there, is that it?

MR. NESSEN: The CDC at the request of the State authorities is looking into the cause of these deaths.

Q You don't think it would be a good idea to close Philadelphia like they used to? (Laughter)

Q Ron, is the CDC examining the possibility of whether this might be swine flu?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is, and I really should not speak for the CDC -- but at the moment, there is no known evidence that this is the swine flu, but that is only to say that the CDC is in the middle of or in the first day of an investigation to find out what it is.

Q Ron, late last week, were some of the papers of former President Nixon removed from the Executive Office Building storage and placed in a depository in Suitland, Maryland?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that that was done last week. I know that a month or so ago there was some movement that the court directed for the purpose of making room, I think, but that was a while back, a month or two ago, if I remember. I have a vague recollection that that happened.

Q Ron, movement of what?

MR. NESSEN: Of some of the stored materials over in the EOB.

Q And the court directed that to make room?

MR. NESSEN: I assume so.

Q Or did the White House request it?

MR. NESSEN: The White House does not have anything to do with the papers. It is the GSA.

Q Would that include tapes, too, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, I don't know any of the details; I just have the vague recollection of having heard that.

Q Can we find out what the details are?

MR. NESSEN: I think the GSA can probably help you with that, Helen.

Q Ron, if the President is seeing all these people about the Vice Presidency now and talking to them and taking their views, why doesn't he give an appointment to Congressman Railsback of Illinois, who wants to talk to him about some Vice Presidential nominees?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I am sure that Tom Railsback has certainly been solicited by Congressman Rhodes for his views and --

Q No, Mr. Railsback asked last week to have an appointment with the President for himself and one or two others.

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that, but I will look into it.

Q Would you check on that and see if he is going to be given a chance to come down and help the President?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it.

Q Ron, to follow up Jim's first question about your role in this, Editor and Publisher Magazine in a two-page spread on Jody Powell quotes him as saying that he and Governor Carter have discussed the White House Press Secretary's role "usually after reading about an incident involving the Press Secretary dealing with the press."

Powell is also quoted as saying the following: "There should be more frequent press conferences to take the tension out of the relationship between the President and the press. The feeling by many reporters that a Press Secretary is only feeding them bits and crumbs must be eliminated."

What is your feeling about such a statement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any particular feeling.

Q Can you imagine Jody Powell forbidding reporters from watching Governor Carter board a helicopter?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any particular view on it, Les.

Q Will the President look over Connally's file in relation to Watergate before he makes any decision on the Vice Presidency?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Helen, the stage that the selection process is in now is to receive a lot of suggestions and the second or next stage when we get to it, I will give you some details on how that works.

Q The President said in two interviews that an FBI check on his part for a political person would be illegal.

MR. NESSEN: He has been advised by the Attorney General that that is not a proper function of the FBI.

Q Now, you didn't quite conclude or I didn't understand your conclusion to my first question about the Connally file. You say now the stage is to get suggestions. Then what will happen, exactly?

MR. NESSEN: We will let you know when we get there.

Q You will let me know when you get to the point of Connally's file?

MR. NESSEN: When we get to the point of what comes after collecting all of the suggestions.

Q That is very vague.

Q Ron, does the President have any plans to ask prospective running mates for a detailed report on their health and their financial situation as Governor Carter did?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I say, after we get through with the stage of getting ideas and names, the President will go on to the next stage of his selection process and I will tell you the details of that when we get there. I will get you that when we get there.

Q Ron, why does the President not say now whether he will announce his Vice Presidential choice before the Convention?

MR. NESSEN: The President has said he will announce his choice at the appropriate time.

Q I know, but I am asking why he has taken that view since the Reagan forces have already announced their choice and there has been a lot of flak about that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know about the flak part, but I know that this is the President's procedure that he now has launched and is well underway, and it will continue.

Q Sort of a secrecy proceeding, that he won't tell what he is planning to do?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that probably you would get a pretty stiff argument from some folks who would say it is an amazingly open procedure of asking over 5,000 people to suggest --

Q But not telling what he plans to do with that or answer it?

MR. NESSEN: Names and ideas.

THE PRESS: Thank you.