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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E #553

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:03 P.M. EDT

AUGUST 5, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: I would say it looks now like the President is going to Camp David tomorrow evening and spend the weekend there.

Q Up until Sunday, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. That means he will depart by helicopter from Camp David to go to Philadelphia, leaving Camp David by helicopter about 2:15 on Sunday. There will be five seats for people in the staff helicopter going to Philadelphia. That would be the AP and the UPI, a wire photo from each of the wires and a pool writer yet to be designated. That is the good news.

The bad news is that the pool chopper leaves from Camp David. So that means that the poolers will have to get themselves to Camp David by something a little before 2:15 on Sunday. I am going to let you work this out with Larry.

If you need a car or station wagon to get the five poolers up there, we will try to work that out. So, talk to Larry after the briefing or take a little time to figure out what the transportation problems are.

I don't have the President's departure time for Camp David tomorrow evening or tomorrow afternoon, but we will get that to you.

Q He is not going to return to Camp David, is he?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q So, anybody with a car up there --

MR. NESSEN: That is the problem. If you go up as a pooler to cover his stay, you will have to sell your car or something.

As I said, the President will be leaving Camp David by helicopter at 2:15 on Sunday. The people who want to cover the trip to Philadelphia other than poolers, will leave by press plane from Andrews on Sunday. Check-in is 1:30, and takeoff time is 2 o'clock.

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The President's schedule after takeoff is to arrive at the Philadelphia International Airport at 3:30. He, then, goes by motorcade to the Spectrum, where he will attend a reception with the Cardinals and other leaders of the Eucharistic Congress. The arrival at the stadium -- it is called JFK Stadium in Philadelphia -- is at 4:30. The President will speak briefly at 4:45 and will leave the stadium at 6:15 by motorcade.

The President will return to Washington by Air Force One, rather than by helicopter, so the pool will be the normal size ten-man Air Force One pool. The President will arrive at Andrews at 7:30 and back to the White House by helicopter.

So that is the deal, and I think, as I said, that the best thing to do would be to figure out what your needs are in the way of transportation and then get in touch with Larry, if you think the best way to do it would be to lay on a station wagon for that five-man helicopter.

Q Who will be going to Camp David with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Mrs. Ford, and I am not sure which staff people will be staying overnight, but some will be going up there on Saturday to work on different projects.

Q Will anyone from out of town be flying in on Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, no.

Q What about an advance on the remarks? Will you put those out in Washington, say, on Saturday night?

MR. NESSEN: On the Eucharistic Congress remarks?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Let me see where that stands.

I have not seen a draft on that yet.

Q Is Mrs. Ford going to Philadelphia, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check.

Q When you say laying on a car, do you mean going up on Sunday with a White House car?

MR. NESSEN: There are various ways to do it. We could take the pool up on Friday, but then, how would you get from the motel to Camp David?

Q Could you bring the car down and get us?

MR. NESSEN: We could bring a car down to the motel. That was one thought.

Q Will anybody be coming back from Philadelphia?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I hope they don't quarantine the press plane.

Q There is no plan to hold this up until there is a final report on that?

MR. NESSEN: No, there is not.

Q Is he going to make it a point not to eat while he is up there? I am serious.

MR. NESSEN: I know you are, I don't know. As I told Helen yesterday, if the CDC comes up with something that would make it seem to be inadvisable for the President to go or would make it advisable for the President to take certain precautions, or for everybody to take precautions, I am sure they would be put into force. At this stage, it is too early to talk about that.

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Q Is he going to have a swine flu shot before he goes to Kansas City?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is the swine flu shots have not been released by the drug companies for use.

Q You said they have had no report today? You said they might by afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: By afternoon, but he hasn't had an updated report on the swine flu today.

Q If he gets a report this afternoon, will you give us an update on that?

MR. NESSEN: I will, of course.

Q I see the President sent another letter last night to Mansfield beseeching Congress to quickly enact this legislation for the swine flu program.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Is he also putting any pressure or having personal contact with either the drug industry or insurance industry, making any phone calls to them?

MR. NESSEN: He is not doing that directly, but Secretary Mathews has been doing that for some time.

All right. I don't have anything else.

Q Are there any delegates coming in this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: There aren't any delegates coming in this afternoon.

Q Will the President see Connally today?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans to.

Q Will you let us know if it suddenly happens?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Are there any plans for him to see Connally tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: No, there aren't. I don't know if John Connally will be here tomorrow. He is here for a meeting of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board which meets once every two months, usually on the first Thursday or Friday of the month.

Q Has there been any telephone contact with Mr. Connally?

MR. NESSEN: No. OFF THE RECORD.

Q As a man who spent five or six years campaigning for Republicans, one year spending 200 nights out of the year out of town, I wonder if the President had any reaction to Connally's threat to go out and campaign against a Republican?

MR. NESSEN: I am unfamiliar with that last part of your question.

Q Connally, in an interview, was quoted as saying he was going out and campaign against Paul Findley because of the letter Paul Findley had written criticizing his possible selection as Vice President.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any comment on that.

Q Did the President know about that? Did he talk to you about that?

MR. NESSEN: If it was in the newspapers he probably knew about it, but we didn't specifically talk about that, no.

Q Did he have any reaction in general to the attack on Connally the last few days?

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not.

Q Ron, day after day we have had delegates coming in here and there is obviously political activity in the White House. Could you give us some ideas, your rationale, as to why, therefore, you can't answer when asked to comment on statements by the Carter campaign? I mean, last night they hit the Nixon-Ford Administration again and also the actor situation. Are you suggesting it is consistent to have delegates coming here all the time, all this political activity, but suddenly you rise above it? I am just hoping to get some answer, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I just don't have anything to say about that.

Q Are there any more delegates coming in this week?

MR. NESSEN: Not today, but I thought I saw a possibility of some coming in later in the week, if I can find my schedule.

Q That would have to be tomorrow.

MR. NESSEN: There isn't much of the week left, is there.

Here is the schedule. I saw "Greet Olympic Delegation," and I thought that was delegates. I looked at that hurriedly and I thought it was delegates. There are no more delegates coming in this week.

Q No kidding? Is that a Greek Olympic Delegation from the United States? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I said "greet," as in saying hello to them.

Q I thought you said "Greek."

MR. NESSEN: Let me straighten all this out now. Many members of the United States Olympic Team just back from Montreal will be coming back here this afternoon, and the President will greet them in the sense of saying hello, but there are no Convention delegates coming for the rest of the week.

Q Part of the Russian track team, are they coming in, too?

MR. NESSEN: Did they take a tour this morning? I guess they are here for the meeting at College Park.

Q What was discussed this morning at the meeting with the President and the Congressional leadership?

MR. NESSEN: Actually there were two subjects on the agenda and an additional subject discussed in passing. One was the Clean Air amendments, which are now being debated in Congress, and the second item on the agenda was the so-called post card voter registration proposal, and then very briefly there was a mention of the swine flu liability legislation.

Q Mr. Rhodes said the other day that Mr. Carter was playing dirty election tricks by trying to push this post card registration through. Did the President say anything about that, about Mr. Carter's ethics in this?

MR. NESSEN: No, Mr. Carter didn't come up in that discussion. The President's views on the so-called post card registration, I think, have been clear for some time. He is opposed to it.

Q Mr. Rhodes had said the President definitely will veto it; is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we ever got to that point. I never heard that stated this morning flatly like that. There is some question whether such legislation would ever get here. But the President is opposed to it because he feels that it is -- well, let's see how I can say this -- that it lends itself or would lend itself to the possibilities of fraud.

Q What did they tell him -- what did Mr. Rhodes say about it to the President this morning?

MR. NESSEN: That part of the discussion -- after the President stated his objections to it, there was a discussion of what the prospects were of getting it through Congress and how the sides lined up, and so forth.

Q What did Rhodes say?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't mention this other outside --

Q Did he say anything about the prospects -- I am asking what did Mr. Rhodes say were the prospects?

MR. NESSEN: I frankly forgot what he said the prospects were. I didn't make notes of that part of the conversation.

Q That is a crucial point, Ron. Don't you have anybody who has any notes on that?

MR. NESSEN: It comes up today in the House.

Q Is the President opposed to the basic concept of post card registration, or is he simply opposed to the timing of it at this time, this close to a national election?

MR. NESSEN: No. It has nothing to do with the election. It has to do with several parts of it. One, he said he believes it lends itself to fraud. Secondly, he feels that Congress would be injecting itself into a matter that has traditionally been handled by the States. Voter registration is traditionally a State matter and this bill would reverse that long tradition and set up a kind of Federal system of requirements for voter registration. So, those two elements are his primary objections.

Q Sort of like the Voting Rights Act, isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: Wasn't that a civil rights issue rather than a matter of registration?

Q Does the President say in what way it would lend itself to fraud? Mr. Rhodes made the same charge, but it wasn't really described.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it was really spelled out in very much detail today, but it was felt that it would be difficult to make sure that the people sent in to register by mail were not already registered, perhaps under another name, people who didn't actually live in the State where they were registering might be able to register, and it might be possible even to register people who were no longer living.

Q Are the Soviets violating the new SALT treaty terms with underground explosions?

MR. NESSEN: I think most of you know there have been two fairly recent Soviet tests, one on July 4. and one on July 29, underground in the Soviet Union. In specific answer to your question, the answer is no, Helen. I say that for two reasons: One, the treaty has not been ratified by either country yet so it is not in force; secondly, the technicians are still going over their measurements to determine exactly what the size of those two tests were. It is very complex to try to determine the exact size of an underground explosion, and they have not made that determination yet.

Q Was there an informal promise that, until the treaty was ratified, there would be no explosions above the 150 kiloton figure?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there was an understanding. There was no understanding, but the two sides, each made separate statements that somewhat dealt with that issue. The United States said that it had no plans for tests above 150 kilotons and the Soviets said they did not plan to take any action incompatible with that provision of the treaty. That was to hold during the period between signing and ratification, which has not yet taken place by either country.

Q These were unilateral statements, not the results of any agreements or understanding?

MR. NESSEN: That was my understanding.

Q Does the President consider these two blasts to be incompatible with the treaty?

MR. NESSEN: There is no way of knowing, Wally, because we don't know yet what the size of the blasts were.

Q Do you understand the Soviet statement to mean they were promising not to do anything over 150 and, if it turns out they did, it would be incompatible; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't want to interpret what the Soviets meant by not taking any action incompatible with the provision of the treaty. Since we don't really know, the scientists have not yet determined the precise size of those two explosions, I would rather not take on a hypothetical question of "what if."

Q Has there been any communication with the Soviet Union to question the size of the tests?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, there has not. This is being done independently by our own monitoring system.

I would only say this, though, along this line, that the treaty went up to Congress I guess on the 29th of last month -- July. I would only make this point, that if the treaty were in effect--if Congress would ratify the treaty, let me put it that way--then all the provisions would take effect, including the 150 kiloton limit, but, also, the provision for the exchange of data. So if there is a questionable test and the treaty had been ratified, then we would have the right to ask for data from the Soviets to help us determine what the size of the test was.

Q When do you expect to know kilotonnage -- the tonnage of those explosions? I ask this because in the past they have always been able to make a computer run within a matter of hours after getting the seismic information concerning the tonnage.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but what you have come up with in the past has been that the test was within the range of 20 to 200 kilotons. There was always a magnitude of 10.

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Q They have always had a computer run of that sort.

MR. NESSEN: Not this quickly. On the underground test, part of the problem is that you have to know what the geological state of the rock is around the test, the coupling mechanism and so forth. That takes time, and they have not yet determined that.

Q When do you expect to have the information?

MR. NSSSEN: I can't give you a time yet.

Q Do the American scientists think the tests had anything to do with the Chinese earthquakes?

MR. NESSEN: I have not asked that question.

Q Ron, do you have a reading as to whether or not it exceeds the limit? You may not know how far it exceeds, but is there any information?

MR. NESSEN: No. In the very, very rough range they are looking at, that range straddles 150 kilotons, in other words. So it could be ~~that the test was~~ ... below 150, it could be above 150.

Q In explaining that report in Evans and Novak, I just wondered if possibly the President was told it could exceed it? Apparently, you are saying in the report that it did exceed it.

MR. NESSEN: No, I am saying two things: One, there is no treaty in effect, so there can be no violation. But what was the size of the tests? They are trying to narrow down this range which straddles the 150 kiloton mark. That is what the President was told, that they are trying to narrow this down and find out which side of the line the test was on.

Q When the President talked to the Mississippi delegates, had he been told there was a possibility that the tonnage exceeded 150?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he got that report this morning, the one I am talking about, about the straddle figures.

Q After he read the column?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was unrelated to the Evans and Novak column.

Q What are the limits of this range? Is it 145 to 200?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to get into that. I probably should not have said what I did say.

Q On SALT, we understand the ball is in our court, now that we are reviewing the Soviet proposal, and there is the possibility of some breakthrough.

MR. NESSEN: I certainly would not say -- I don't want to say on the possibility of a breakthrough. I think the situation for some time has been that we have been studying some Russian ideas that were sent here in April -- we will check that -- a Russian letter came in April, I believe, and since then we have been studying those ideas from the Russians for the purpose of preparing a reply.

I think some of you have probably found out elsewhere there was an NSC meeting last week, and one of the matters discussed or reviewed was the American reply to that, but I cannot go beyond that.

Q When will it go back to them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a date I can give you.

Q Isn't the President concerned about this? While we are waiting for our own independent study that he can just get on the hotline, some telephone, and call the Russians, or have Secretary Kissinger call them and ask them how much it was? Has no thought been given to this approach?

MR. NESSEN: I, frankly, did not check that approach this morning, Phil, and I would have to go back and ask some people.

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Q Will you check if there has been any direct contact with the Russians?

MR. NESSEN: I will. There has been none that I know of.

Q Has the NSC actually worked on a reply?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go too far down this line, Helen, but I will say the NSC meeting last week reviewed some ideas that could be an American reply, yes.

Q Ron, speaking of Dr. Kissinger, am I correct in assuming that Dr. Kissinger was expressing the Ford Administration's policy when he said in Boston, "It serves nobody's purpose to appoint black personnel unless they meet all qualifications"?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you will look up Bob Funseth's briefing of the day before yesterday where he explored the question, I think at great length --

Q Would you just summarize it. I have to file right after this and can't get down there. Would you just summarize? Was Dr. Kissinger enunciating Ford Administration policy when he made this statement or not?

MR. NESSEN: I think a great deal has been said since then, Les, and Bob Funseth did spell out, I think two days ago, the --

Q I know the announcement about affirmative action, and recruiting on black campuses and all that. I am not asking about Kissinger or Funseth, I am asking about President Ford. Does President Ford agree with the statement that "it serves nobody's purpose to appoint black personnel unless they meet all qualifications"?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to try to sum up the policy of either the State Department or President Ford on that issue --

Q Why not? He was roundly booed up in Boston. I want to know, is this Ford policy enunciated by the Secretary or not, Ron. It is a straightforward, simple question.

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree it is a simple question, Les. It is a complex question.

Q You mean, when the Secretary of State makes a statement like this, which seems to be pretty logical, you mean you can't summarize whether this is the President's position or not?

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Kissinger said more than that on that occasion and a great deal more than that has been said by his Department since that occasion and I think, to try to sum up a policy in an area that complex with a yes or no, is not proper and misleading, in fact.

Q Ron, did the President tell the Virginia delegation yesterday that he would name his Vice Presidential choice when he goes to the Convention?

MR. NESSEN: He did.

Q What did he mean, immediately when he is there or after the nomination, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that what he meant was that his plans right now are at least to announce his Vice Presidential running mate in what has been the traditional manner.

Q After the nomination?

MR. NESSEN: That is the traditional manner.

Let me just catch up a question here. I didn't want to leave you with the impression that the President first learned of the two Soviet tests this morning. What I meant was that this straddle figure was presented to him this morning but the President was briefed on the two tests on July 7th -- that would have been a briefing presumably on the July 4th blast, and on July 30th, which presumably was a briefing on the July 29th explosion.

Q Wasn't it July 30th he went to Mississippi? Wasn't there an NSC meeting on the morning before he went to Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the subject of that meeting was unless that was the one about SALT.

Q Did you get the date of that Russian approach?

MR. NESSEN: The last Russian letter outlining their ideas on SALT was in March, instead of April.

Q Mr. Morton said yesterday that there were going to be some changes in the PFC after the Convention. If Mr. Connally is not on the ticket with the President, is there any possibility that he will be brought into the campaign apparatus, as such?

Q As Treasurer? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You know, we have said before and I think Rog has said before, that there are people going to be added to the PFC once the Convention is over and the campaign begins. In fact, there have been some added and there will be others added. Exactly who they are, I can't give you the names today.

Q The reason I ask this is because a number of Congressmen and Senators who have been backing Connally for Vice President have suggested that he would be very instrumental in his campaigning abilities.

MR. NESSEN: I just can't tell you today who the new people coming to the PFC are.

Q Is there also a possibility Morton would be replaced?

MR. NESSEN: I just want to say again, and strongly, that there are no plans for Rog Morton to leave. I expect him to stay as the Campaign Chairman.

Q He seemed to question his own vitality and charisma in the job, according to the Post. Does that mean to indicate he might want to step down?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't read the quotes that way but regardless of the quotes, I know there are no plans for Rog to leave the Committee.

Q Is the President aware that Mr. Griffin made some statement this morning in regard to Mr. Connally saying, basically, that he could hurt the ticket if he were chosen?

MR. NESSEN: I mentioned to the President that there was a wire service story with that lead on it. I couldn't find any quotes to back up the lead, but I did tell the President about the wire service story.

Q What was the President's reaction to that?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't have any.

Q No reaction whatsoever, a smile, a tear in his eye, anything?

MR. NESSEN: To what?

Q To all those comments about Connally, or reactions to Mr. Connally's statements that appeared in the Post?

MR. NESSEN: I would just say that the President has established what he believes is a sound procedure to gather the views of Members of Congress, as well as others and, incidentally, I will tell you in a minute about another group that has been added to the consulting process, but the President believes he has established a sound procedure to get the views and that this is the proper way for Members of Congress to express their views on who they believe should or should not be the Vice Presidential candidate.

Q What do you mean, "this is the proper way," to him or the public?

MR. NESSEN: To him, Ted. You mean a proper procedure? The proper procedure is to take the President up on his invitation to send in a sealed envelope their selections and the reasons for those selections.

Q But not to make these comments publicly?

Q But I get a suggestion in this that he would rather they did it that way instead of making public statements against one or another Republican.

MR. NESSEN: The President has established what he thinks is a sound procedure and he thinks that is the proper way to proceed.

Q There is a report that he asked some of his people in his home State to knock off the anti-Connally talk in public. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge. I have not heard that.

Q Has he said anything personally to any legislator that they should not discuss the Vice President or their views on Connally in public?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, Helen.

Q Can you find out if he has? Either we are transmitting a message for him or he has done it for himself.

Q Does the President feel that this is at all divisive to the Republican Party at this point to be airing these views in public before anyone has been chosen?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard him say that he felt it was.

Q Ron, there are reports --

MR. NESSEN: I think there is more to this line of questioning.

Q You simply didn't answer my question about whether he has had any reaction one way or the other about Mr. Connally's statements or any of the others.

MR. NESSEN: I think I have indicated over the past few days that now that this process is in train and people are sending their names in and there are recommendations, that I just don't think it is proper for me to comment on specific people and the pros and cons, or what may have been said for or against them.

Q I am not asking for that.

Q You are implying that he is angry?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I hope you don't infer that from what I have said.

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Q I am inferring that he is giving a message to Congressmen and Senators to shut up on Connally.

MR. NESSEN: I did not hear anything in my remarks that would lead me to do that.

Q You said he would rather have them mailed to him and not necessarily in public.

MR. NESSEN: I am saying the procedure the President has established is the one he thinks is proper to follow, sending a sealed letter to him.

Q As he sees it, this is the only procedure?

MR. NESSEN: He thinks it is a sound procedure, and the proper one, Phil.

Q Is he trying to muzzle anyone else's statement on the subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by muzzle. Look, the whole aim of the exercise has been, as I have said over the past couple of days in response to another kind of question, is truly to give the President the views of a very wide range of people.

This morning, he directed that letters be sent to 350 Republican Mayors and other local officials so they will have an input. As I tried to say in response to some questions, as I say on a slightly different point, this is a genuine consulting process to receive views and to bring up names and people who might have escaped attention and to eliminate the assets of various candidates.

So, I am saying that has been established by the President for what he believes is a very worthwhile effort to consult widely. So, having said all that, that is why he believes it is the proper way to proceed.

Q Does he think it is improper for --

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to comment beyond what I have said.

Q But your statement was in response, obviously, to the statements made during the past two days on Connally.

MR. NESSEN: No, it wasn't. That was not even the question I was asked. I was asked about the procedure and how the President was going to learn of candidates and their pros and cons, or the view of their pros and cons.

Q Ron, you are not saying anti-Connally talk is proper or improper, are you?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly am not saying one way or the other. It is not my job to say that. My job is to tell you what the President's view on this procedure is.

Q Does the President feel it is proper or improper ?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he is going to make that judgment, either.

Q He has no feeling about when statements are made outside the White House about Connally, he does not care?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I am telling you how he intends to go about selecting his Vice Presidential running mate and he obviously feels it is the proper way, and the best way.

Q Ron, there are recurring reports that the intent of the Republican National Committee --

MR. NESSEN: Let's finish this line of questioning.

Q Ron, as a personal friend of Mr. Connally, which you repeatedly mentioned that the President was, does he feel at all it is unfair for some of these Congressmen and so forth to bring up Mr. Connally's connection with the bribery trial, considering that he was acquitted? Does he feel that is a little bit below the belt?

MR. NESSEN: I think in the present context, and given the present procedure that is underway, that I am just not going to be able to answer that question.

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Q Ron, does the President believe that his Vice Presidential running mate, whoever he may be, should be free to campaign as he wishes including campaigning against Republicans?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is a little premature.

Q Ron, on the process, is the President getting continuing reports of the views expressed by these various people or is he waiting for them all to be gathered and then be given a final report?

MR. NESSEN: No. Every day he is hearing different people's views on this matter, mostly through people who come in to visit him on various items of business, or personal business. As I said the other day, every meeting I have sat in on lately, people have volunteered their thoughts. You are talking about the several hundred Members of Congress --

Q Party leaders, delegates.

MR. NESSEN: -- the delegates and the RNC and so forth. Let me check and find out the kind of timetable for bringing him the tally.

Q Ron, is the deadline for today's group of letters still August 11?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q It is?

MR. NESSEN: Are you talking of the mayors and city officials?

Saul wants to know, I said a new group has been added, local officials and mayors. The letter to them was very similar to the one sent to Congressmen and Senators and it did have the August 11 deadline in it.

Q About how many letters were sent out?

MR. NESSEN: 350 mayors and local officials.

Q Ron, you were going to ask the President -- I asked you to ask him if he would like to have other, just plain, old Republicans around the country, write him and tell him their choices?

MR. NESSEN: He would welcome anybody's ideas, Phil, and in fact unsolicited -- a good deal of the mail that comes in these days deals with the Vice Presidency.

Q How many people has he asked for their opinion on this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the running total. The delegates are something like 4,500, roughly. Members of Congress, I forget how many Republicans are there -- around 200, maybe -- over 350 local officials, and Mary Louise Smith is soliciting the Republican National Committee officials. I don't know how many that is. It must be a minimum of a hundred because you have a committee man and a committee woman from each State and another 50 for the State chairmen, so that is 150 -- it is over or around 5,000.

I was going to say, Phil, certainly the President welcomes anybody's views on this important matter, and some of the mail that comes in just in the normal course of things lately has been suggesting Vice Presidential --

Q You will include this in this part of the consultation process?

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. It doesn't have a break-down of how many pieces dealt with that but, out of 14,600 pieces of mail last week, that is the week of July 26 to 30, total mail to the President was 14,600. The memo to the President simply said, "Interest in your choice of a Vice Presidential running mate also sharpened this week." But, it doesn't break down how many of those --

Q May we have a list of the 350 local officials and mayors to whom this request went?

MR. NESSEN: I will see if I can get the names for you.

The PFC will have the mailing list on those.

Q Ron, could you tell us when and why the President has decided to recommend his choice of a running mate "in the traditional manner?" How long ago was that decided?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President, when he has talked about the appropriate time, I think by "appropriate time" he always meant the traditional time.

Q Why hasn't he said that?

MR. NESSEN: He likes to add a little mystery.

Q Was he asked that question in Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that he was, or if he was, he said the appropriate time.

Q You never explained the appropriate time. You have been asked two weeks in a row steadily.

MR. NESSEN: That was the way the President preferred to express it until a delegate from Virginia asked him last night, and he clarified it.

Q You said the other day there would be a second stage to this Vice Presidential selection. If he makes the announcement in the traditional way --

MR. NESSEN: That is the third stage. The second stage is checking out the qualifications as he narrows his choices.

Q Does the President intend to leave most of the campaigning up to his Vice Presidential running mate while he stays here in Washington and more or less takes care of the job, and is this plan the reason you suddenly refuse to discuss politics in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: The President -- one of the things he is doing these days, is thinking about and talking about, is the fall campaign and, at the moment, he has not made some of the decisions that would enable me --

Q You mean, there is a possibility he might do this; that is, leave the bulk of the campaigning to the Vice Presidential running mate and stay here?

MR. NESSEN: He has not completely settled on his campaign strategy.

Q Ron, can I clear up one thing? I am unclear on the sequence of events concerning these underground blasts. The President got his two briefings on July 7 and July 30. Only this morning was he told those tests could straddle 150, right?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what was in the July 7 and July 30 briefings, because I didn't see those. I will have to check and see what was in those reports.

Q They haven't refined the July 4 analysis?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q In a month?

MR. NESSEN: I know, Pat, but it is difficult because of the need to know the geology, the coupling mechanism and so forth, and it has not been determined yet.

Q Ron, one more question on the Vice Presidency. The President several times refused to rule out Reagan as a running mate, but I notice in either the De Frank interview or the one in Time he was asked about Reagan and said there might be a place for him in his Administration, such as in the Cabinet. He didn't say anything about the Vice Presidency. Can we assume he has ruled out the Vice Presidency?

MR. NESSEN: I think the question was worded in a way that led to that answer. I think it was a question of, do you have anything else in mind for him if he is not the nominee. I don't know what your question was, but that was my memory of it.

Q Is Henry Kissinger being sent away at this time because he could be a political liability?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is not. I don't even like to have to deny that.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:45 P.M. EDT)

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