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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:42 A.M. EDT

AUGUST 31, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I have a couple of personnel announcements today. The President asked me to announce the appointment of Douglas J. Smith as Special Assistant to the President. Doug has been on Bob Hartmann's staff as a consultant and as Bob's acting deputy and has been involved in the speechwriting operation. He now becomes Bob's deputy with title of Special Assistant to the President.

Before coming to the White House, Doug Smith was at the Pentagon. He came to the White House in November of 1975.

We have a biographical sketch of Doug here and we will hand it out after the briefing.

Q What does that pay?

MR. NESSEN: The range is \$36-38,000.

Q The same as yesterday's deputy?

MR. NESSEN: It is a deputy to a senior staff member, that is correct.

In my office, I think you know Larry Speakes has joined Senator Dole as his Press Secretary. I have asked Bill Roberts, who you all know, to move up a notch and take over Larry's office and Larry's duties here in the lower press office. Then, to take Bill Robert's place, I have asked Margaret Earl to come over from her job of helping you out with information in the domestic area and to take on the title of Assistant Press Secretary and to work here in the lower press office. I think she will continue to be helpful to you in the area, especially of domestic issues, but she will be working here in the lower press office.

To take her place as a specialist in domestic matters I have asked Jim Shuman. . . Jim had previously been the editor of the President's news summary and handled other chores in the communications office. He is now going to take Margaret Earl's place as Specialist on the press office staff dealing in domestic matters.

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Q Who takes his place? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Agnes Waldron is taking on the job of editor of the news summary.

Q Maybe you should have kept Speakes. (Laughter).

MR. NESSEN: When he comes back he has to get in at the end of the line and start all over again. (Laughter)

One addition to the schedule today. At 6 o'clock, the President has asked Dean Burch, Bill Ruckelshaus, Mike Duval and Dick Cheney to come and discuss with him the status of the negotiations on the debates, and the President will give his representatives their instructions on how to conduct themselves at tomorrow's meeting of the representatives.

Q Will we see them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. Well, you will certainly see them tomorrow when they go into the negotiations, but there is no plan to bring them out after this meeting today. This was just a chance for them to bring the President up-to-date and for him to give them his instructions.

Q Ron, could I ask on that point, will a counter-proposal be made to Carter about the three debates, each one running 1 hour 15 minutes, which he seems to favor?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Russ, the President, at Vail -- I think you were there -- laid out what he believes is the best format for the debates to achieve their purpose, which is to give the people an opportunity to hear the two candidates discuss in detail the most important issues. That is the President's proposal. That is the proposal taken into the meeting by his representatives last week.

There was progress made in working out the format and the other arrangements for the debates. There was also an agreement at that time not to discuss publicly the negotiations because they were supposed to be negotiations aimed at setting up these debates for the good of the public.

We kept our part of the bargain, which was not to discuss them publicly, and we intend to keep our part of the bargain.

Q Is it the feeling here that the Carter people are not acting in good faith, by disclosing publicly Carter's view about how many debates and how long they should be?

MR. NESSEN: I am just going to say for our part, we made an agreement and we are going to keep our part of the agreement.

Q Ron, I fail to see the difference -- and I appreciate it being corrected -- I fail to see the difference between Carter laying out his ideas of number of debates and how long they should be and the subject matters that should be handled and obviously, or presumably rather, to his best advantage, and the President laying out his ideas beginning with defense and naming the other three subjects and they should be for 90 minutes or more and so forth.

How do the Carter people fail to keep their -- the implication is they failed to keep their end of the bargain.

MR. NESSEN: There was no implication in my remarks, Bob. We laid out our position a week or so ago -- I guess more than a week or so ago now. The negotiations began last week. There, progress was made. There was an agreement not to say anything while the negotiations were going on and that is what we are doing.

Q Do you feel the Carter people violated that agreement?

MR. NESSEN: That is not for me to say, I don't think.

Q You are certainly implying that, Ron, and, if so, I think there is an obligation to say where they violated it.

MR. NESSEN: I am not implying that. I am not suggesting anything. I am just telling you where we stand on debates.

Q Where do we stand on travel this weekend? Are we going out campaigning on Labor Day weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have anything for you yet.

Q Whether you have anything specific or not, could you give us guidance on whether you expect we might?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you any guidance because the decisions have not been made that would enable me to.

Q How about the meeting with the Republican leaders?

MR. NESSEN: Didn't they come out and talk to you about it?

Q Well, they talked to us vaguely. Does the President have any reaction to the report of Senator Scott's testimony before the Congress committee on the \$45,000 loan?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with it, Fran.

Q That didn't come up?

MR. NESSEN: No, it did not.

Q Is the park bill going up today?

MR. NESSEN: It is very possible that maybe even before we put the lunch lid on I will be able to give you some guidance as to whether and, if so, at what time the President will sign the parks proposal.

Q Has the President called Governor Reagan since he returned from Vail?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check. I have not heard that he did.

Q Were you present in the GOP leadership meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I was present for the first hour, at which point I had to go to another meeting. I left John Carlson in there.

Q Was the parks bill discussed in that first hour?

MR. NESSEN: The parks bill was not discussed in the first hour.

Q Can we ask John to what extent it was discussed in the meeting at all, and whether prospects were discussed?

MR. CARLSON: I think the President discussed the seven major areas and concentrated on the recreational areas and the environmental areas.

Q Did he lay out the parks bill in any detail for them? Did he ask them to get to work at making this a priority item?

MR. CARLSON: He said he hoped this would pass. He said he will have some good sponsors and hopes they will have early action on the parks bill.

Q Do you know if the President signed the New River bill?

MR. NESSEN: When will he sign the New River Bill? Does it have Congressional approval?

Q Would you check on when he is going to sign it?

MR. NESSEN: Is it all the way through Congress?

MR. CARLSON: It has not come here yet.

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Q Is he going to sign it as soon as it comes up or will he delay?

MR. NESSEN: It will go through the normal procedure, which is to have the Counsel's Office look at it, the Domestic Council, and so forth. I don't foresee any lengthy delay.

Q What is your guess? How long will it take?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you that today. I just don't know.

Q Over the weekend Vice President Rockefeller was quoted as saying, "The GOP platform does not reflect the President's basic philosophy or belief in its total." Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to see what the exact Rockefeller quotes were because nobody here has seen the exact Rockefeller quotes.

Q Does the President stand by the GOP platform?

MR. NESSEN: He said before -- I think he said out in Kansas City that he can run on this platform.

Q The two veterans folks on the President's schedule, did they ask for the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: As I understand it, this is a tradition, that the newly elected president of each of the major veterans organizations traditionally comes in to have his picture taken with the President and have a courtesy call.

Q Is there going to be a political discussion following, for example, Jimmy Carter's remarks about pardon and so on?

MR. NESSEN: These are down, I think, for five or ten minutes at the most, to have their pictures taken and introduce their families, I guess, to the President.

Q Is the President going to address the National Guard Association meeting tomorrow, and will that be any kind of major address?

MR. NESSEN: I think he will drop in at the meeting and I suspect he will have relatively brief remarks.

Q Is that in Washington tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, in the area of 10 o'clock. I don't expect that we will have an advance text. I don't expect, in fact, that he will speak from a text. I think he will speak perhaps from notes or off the cuff.

Annie?

Q Will President Ford announce his campaign Steering Committee or is that something Rogers Morton will do?

MR. NESSEN: I think Bill Greener and Rog Morton will announce that, I guess, this afternoon or tomorrow morning. That is my understanding of the plan.

Q Ron, on that committee make-up, was it the President's desire to have Ronald Reagan on that committee?

MR. NESSEN: There was never any discussion that I have ever heard of having Ronald Reagan on the Steering Committee. I think there will be certainly those on the Steering Committee who are supporters and are identified with Ronald Reagan.

Q There was no overture made to Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, no. When the names were first listed at Vail there were those on the committee who represent or have campaigned for, or been on Ronald Reagan's committees in various States. You know, as Rog said, one of the chief purposes of the Steering Committee is to increase party unity and make sure that all elements of the Republican Party are represented so they can advise the President in his campaign.

Q Do you know whether Ed Brooke was asked to serve?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall whether that was one of the names or not.

Q Ron, did anybody from the White House work with anybody from Bill Timmons' organization to try and block the no-fault insurance?

MR. NESSEN: I saw that --

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Phil was asking about the Jack Anderson column this morning. I guess the allegation is that Timmons and Korologos somehow used some special influence to get opposition in the Administration to no-fault insurance.

I am not aware of it. I haven't looked into the allegations very much. I just saw the column about five minutes before coming out here. I just didn't have time to look into it.

Q So, if we bring it up tomorrow you will be in a better position?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it.

Q What is the President's reaction to Jimmy Carter's charge yesterday that the President was "timid, fearful and afraid to lead"?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, Bob, on a lot of other occasions, for the next 60-some days, however many days it is, I am not going to answer campaign stump speeches from this podium.

Q Has there been some approach to South Korea following the heavy sentences imposed the other day against political opponents of General Park?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, Ralph. I am not sure about that.

Q Has former President Nixon been in contact with Mr. Ford since he won the Republican nomination?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, he hasn't.

Q Has the President been in contact with the former President?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Will you check on that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The last time I checked the answer was no.

Q Have you checked since the GOP Convention?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I have.

I have two things: One, the President will sign the parks bill at 1:45 in the Rose Garden. He will have a statement to read at that time. You are all invited to come. There may be a few guests. We will put a lid on right after this so you can get to lunch.

The second thing is that the President asked me to read you a statement on his reaction to the Conference Committee agreement yesterday on an extension of the income tax reduction, which you are probably familiar with. The statement goes as follows, and I will have it put in writing for you.

Q Read slowly.

MR. NESSEN: "I am pleased that yesterday's agreement by a House-Senate Conference Committee has moved us one step closer to a reduction in individual income taxes, but no one should be fooled at this apparent progress.

"The Congress had the opportunity to enact a much bigger tax cut -- the \$28 billion tax cut that I recommended earlier this year. But it chose not to grant the American people the additional tax relief they deserve.

"In effect, this tax bill means that the Democratic majority in the Congress is giving the country only half a loaf -- the half it already has -- and is letting the other half be swallowed up by the big spenders."

Q Which half of the loaf is being swallowed up? The end pieces? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think the two end pieces. (Laughter)

We will have this in writing.

There is a lid on until the signing ceremony. That signing ceremony is open for camera coverage if you want to.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:06 P.M. EDT)