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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:45 P.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 10, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President has asked Secretary of State Kissinger to undertake another trip to Africa to continue his consultations on the issues involved in Southern Africa.

The Secretary, at the President's direction, will be leaving Washington Monday, this coming Monday, and he plans to visit first Tanzania, then Zambia, and then South Africa.

It is possible that he may visit other African capitals, but that will depend on the situation there and on his own schedule.

Q Is one of those Rhodesia?

MR. NESSEN: That just depends on the situation there and his schedule.

Q How long will he be gone?

MR. NESSEN: That also depends on how his mission unfolds. The Secretary will come in here tomorrow to meet with the President at 9 o'clock in the morning to receive his final instructions and to review a final time for the plans for his trip.

After that, Secretary Kissinger will go back to the State Department, where he will hold a news conference at 11 o'clock. So, I would hope that for the answers to your detailed questions about itinerary and objectives and so forth, you would hold these and ask him those there tomorrow.

Q When you say South Africa, you mean the Union of South Africa and not Southern Africa?

MR. NESSEN: I mean the nation of South Africa.

Q Ron, on the last question, the reference to South Africa is as a country, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

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Well, what we are talking about are the problems of Southern Africa, which encompasses the region. But, as for the specific location of where the Secretary will go, he will go to the country of South Africa as the third stop on his trip.

Q Is this being announced at the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: I don't believe so.

Another event tomorrow will be at noon, the signing of the New River Bill. I think some of you may recall this. It is a river that has been maintained in its natural state, mostly in North Carolina. There were proposals to, I believe, erect a hydro-electric dam or some sort of dam on that river, and legislation was passed which was favored by the President, which would prohibit that and would maintain the river in its wild state. That will be signed tomorrow at noon in the Rose Garden. We will have fact sheets and so forth, background material on that.

The United States and Canada have invited the North Atlantic Council to visit the United States and Canada from September 12 to September 17. During the portion of the visit to Washington, the Council will meet with President Ford. The date of that is September 15 for the meeting, and they will also meet with other high Administration officials.

Q Will that be before the trip to Ann Arbor?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What is the North Atlantic Council?

MR. NESSEN: The North Atlantic Council is composed of the permanent representatives to NATO, which are normally stationed in Brussels, the headquarters of the North Atlantic Council.

Q These are the ambassadors, right?

MR. NESSEN: These are the permanent ambassadors and representatives to NATO.

Q They are going to be here? I did not understand what you said.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they have been invited to visit the United States and Canada and part of that will be in Washington, and during the Washington trip, they will meet with the President.

Q What were the dates of the visit?

MR. NESSEN: The overall dates of the visit are September 12 to September 17.

Q Is that for both countries or just here?

MR. NESSEN: That is to both countries, during that five-day period. Among the other places they will visit, at the invitation of Admiral Isaac Kidd, who is the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Atlantic, the Council will receive briefings and visit military installations at Norfolk, which is the headquarters of the Allied Command for the Atlantic, and they will also visit Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where the members will be the guests at a dinner given by the Honorable Allen J. McEachen, who is the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada.

That is, a dinner in Halifax -- as his guests -- and during that same period the North Atlantic Council will also visit Canadian Naval Air facilities on the East Coast of Canada.

Q Ron, is Admiral Isaac Kidd an American or British?

Q He is American.

Q What does the President expect to talk to these ambassadors about?

MR. NESSEN: This is not the first time he has met with this group. They were here before on June 19, 1975, and, of course, the President himself went to Brussels, I guess in 1975 also. He will discuss with them Atlantic Alliance matters.

Q Is there any particular international matter that requires their coming here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the agenda at the moment, but once the invitation was extended to come to the United States and Canada, then the permanent representatives, or the North Atlantic Council and the NATO Secretary General, asked for a chance to meet the President while they were in North America.

I would say in a general way -- and I can't give you the specific agenda right now -- but in a general way, you could say they will discuss a broad range of defense and security issues of interest to the NATO countries.

Q Is Southern Africa likely to be one of them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a precise agenda to give you. I know some of the NATO countries have a particular interest in that, but I can't give you the agenda now.

Q As part of the process of briefing the Democratic candidate for President, will Carter be invited to take part in that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans for that.

Q Ron, was the President pleased to have won the encouraged approval of the Catholic bishops today in contrast to the discouragement with Jimmy Carter?

MR. NESSEN: Rather than answer that specific question -- because the President did not hear what the bishops said down here --

Q Wasn't it conveyed to him? It is rather important.

MR. NESSEN: I showed him some wire copy on it.

Q Didn't the wire copy mention --

MR. NESSEN: Let me answer what I think is your question, Les. The President was very pleased by his meeting with the bishops. He feels that it was a frank exchange of views. He looks forward to meeting the bishops again in the future. This is his second meeting with them and he looks forward to meeting them again in the future.

Q Ron, the bishops said the President himself raised the issue of parochial schools. Could you tell us what he said about that, and why he raised it?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend the meeting, but as you know, the bishops had a statement which they presented.

Q Parochial schools was not a part of it. I wonder why the President voluntarily raised the issue of parochial schools and what he had to say about it?

Q It was aid to parochial schools, I believe.

MR. NESSEN: The President really merely restated the position that he has taken publicly before, which is that on the subject of non-profit private schools the President feels that they provide diversity and competition in the education system. He is committed to that idea and he will always look at with interest any idea that can be developed that would meet the Constitutional test in terms of providing aid to non-public schools.

Q Did he come up with any ideas himself today?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did he suggest any specific initiatives the Administration might take?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q How long was the meeting with the bishops?

MR. NESSEN: I would have to get the timing for you off the log.

It was 10:13 to 11:25. It sounds like an hour and 12 minutes to me.

Q Ron, the President said he would study the problem of Federal funding for abortions.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q If he was correctly quoted by the bishops, he said he was personally opposed to that. Is that a new position?

MR. NESSEN: No. It is not a new position. The President really has not taken a public position on that particular aspect of it. It has been raised, I guess. As you saw, it was raised in the bishops' own statement, and he said that he would study it with a view toward making sure that it did not exceed the minimum requirements of the current Supreme Court ruling.

Q What are those current minimum requirements?

MR. NESSEN: That is a legal question that I can't give you an answer to. In fact, that is one of the matters to be studied, but obviously the 1973 ruling is operative.

Q Archbishop Bernardin said the President had expressed the view that some of the agencies of the Executive Branch of which he is the head had exceeded what he would like them to do in the area of providing abortions. What did he have in mind?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that the Archbishop said exactly that.

Q He sure did.

Q Ron, the Archbishop said the President told him that some of the departments seemed to go beyond what he feels needs to be done. Those are his exact words.

Q What did he have in mind?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the purposes of the study.

Q He must have some impression that that is the case, if that is what he said. And what did he base it on?

MR. NESSEN: He based it on what has been printed in the papers and what the bishops brought to his attention. They understand that Federal money is being spent through Medicaid and other Federal programs, and you can read their statement in the paper.

Q Who will conduct this study?

MR. NESSEN: The Domestic Council in connection with the White House Counsel's Office will conduct the study for the President.

Q What people? What individuals?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think they have assigned the specific people.

Q What form will it take? Is this going to be a major undertaking or a task force?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you the details of it. It will be undertaken by the Domestic Council and the Counsel's Office.

Q Will that be reported on before the election or after the election?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know when it will be reported on, Jim, but the study is being organized now.

Q Ron, was the Archbishop correct when he characterized the President's position on this as this study he hopes would lead to some conclusions on what should be done to put some restraints on Federal funds going for abortion and things like that?

MR. NESSEN: I thought what the Archbishop said was to make sure that these activities carried on by Federal funds don't go beyond what the --

Q That is not what the Archbishop said. He specifically used the term "restraints." The President wanted a study to see what could be done to put on some restraints. Now, did the Archbishop quote the President correctly?

MR. NESSEN: I think he was certainly conveying to you the idea that the President conveyed to them, which was he wants to make sure none of these Federal programs go beyond the minimum required by the current Supreme Court ruling.

Q Ron, you said yesterday you would check with the President to see what his viewpoints are on the question of contraception, which Bill Ryan from the Catholic Conference assures me the bishops are still very much opposed to contraception. What did you find out?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten an answer to that question.

Q When do you think we might be able to get an answer? Did they discuss this?

MR. NESSEN: I was not in there. It was not one of the matters they listed on their statement as something they are --

Q Are concerned about?

MR. NESSEN: No, that they intended to bring up or that they put in their statement. But I was not in the meeting.

Q Can we clarify this matter of Federal involvement in abortions? Does the President want to restrain Federal funding or other involvement in abortions, or does he not?

MR. NESSEN: I would say I would use the word "restrain" in the sense of restrain any Federal spending in that area to the minimum required by the current state of the law.

Q What does that mean?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the things the study will look into -- the main point the study will look into.

Q Ron, does the President want to restrain abortion on demand or does he want to restrain all abortion, including cases of rape and incest?

MR. NESSEN: You have to realize one thing here. That is, there are two slightly different aspects of this and I think maybe you could keep this in mind. On the one hand, you have the President's own personal views on this matter, which we have stated over and over again, and you know what they are. On the other hand, you have the fact that the Supreme Court has made a ruling on this matter, and very specifically on this matter, as a matter of fact, and the law or the ruling has to be upheld. So, there are the legal requirements, and the President's own personal view on the matter.

Q Are there legal requirements that certain military hospitals provide abortions?

MR. NESSEN: I am not an expert and I think you need to see what the cases are on this, but my understanding is that the Supreme Court has ruled on that issue.

Q Ron, I didn't understand your position on restraint. I wish you would repeat that.

MR. NESSEN: The President told the bishops -- I am paraphrasing now -- when they raised this issue, that he had asked for this study.

Q When did he ask for it?

MR. NESSEN: Either today or within the past couple of days.

Q He asked for it today?

MR. NESSEN: Or within the past couple of days. Actually, the issue has been discussed over the past couple of days within the White House.

To paraphrase it, the study is to find out whether the various programs in which money is spent by the Federal Government for abortions -- he wants to make sure that that spending is restrained, if you want to use that word -- to no more than the minimum required by the current Supreme Court ruling.

Q I understood the bishops to say he called for the study after they called it to his attention. Did I misunderstand them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely when the President said to Jim Cannon, "Hey, I want a study started."

Q You don't know if the bishops triggered it?

MR. NESSEN: The issue has been around. The issue has been discussed. When he specifically asked for the study, I don't know, but I will check.

Q The bishop's exact words were -- if I remember them correctly -- "He said he will look into it."

MR. NESSEN: I say the study is now being organized.

Q Well, has he asked for it or will he ask for it?

MR. NESSEN: He has asked for it.

Q Does that mean he had asked for it before he met with the bishops?

MR. NESSEN: I said I don't know if it was today or yesterday or the day before that. I will find out.

Q Was Cannon in the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No, Cannon was not in the meeting.

Q Who was?

MR. NESSEN: The President and Dick Cheney, and the bishops.

Q Then, we can ask Cheney?

MR. NESSEN: Dick Cheney, as the staff person in there, would be the one to carry out any Presidential decisions made in the meeting. Cannon knows he is to undertake a study.

Q The President could have told them that after the bishops raised the point; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Either the President did, or Cheney relayed it to Cannon. Cannon knows now.

Q How long does the study run?

MR. NESSEN: You mean the number of pages?

Q No, the number of days between now and November 2nd?

MR. NESSEN: I told Jim earlier that I did not know when it would be concluded.

Q Ron, does the President feel it is fair to the poor to have a local option so the wealthy can afford to fly out of State, but the poor can't?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Ron, you said the other day it was a kind of mutually agreed upon meeting between the bishops and the President.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q When the bishops came out today they said the meeting was held "at his request," meaning Ford's.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know exactly who wrote to whom and who phoned whom and so forth, but as I said, they met before in June of 1975, and at that time the President said, "You know, I hope we can get together again." And the bishops have indicated their desire to hear the President's views on various issues, so --

Q Were they lying to us?

MR. NESSEN: I can't imagine that the bishops would come out here and lie to you.

Q So, you are saying the President invited them?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is how most people get into the White House, is to be invited here by the President.

Q You said it was mutually set and they said the President invited them, so there is a difference, and I would like to get at that.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. It was mutually agreed upon that the President would invite them.

Q Ron, did the bishops meet with anyone else here in the 40 minutes between the time their meeting with the President broke up and the time they came out here?

MR. NESSEN: No. They indicated to us yesterday or even earlier that after the meeting with the President was over they said they wanted 10 minutes -- actually, they took longer -- they wanted 10 minutes somewhere by themselves to discuss among themselves what they would say to you presumably after the meeting, but they had asked prior to today for a little private time for themselves after the meeting.

Q Where was that?

MR. NESSEN: In the Cabinet Room.

Q Ron, why was the President very pleased by his meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Because he had an opportunity to discuss some issues that are of interest to the bishops and to him and to voters and the public, and it was a frank exchange.

Q Does he feel that he made any progress in eliciting support from the bishops with these positions? By saying he is pleased, it suggests --

MR. NESSEN: He was pleased with the meeting. I want that to be clear, that when I went in to talk to the President -- "What did you think of the meeting? What should I tell the reporters of your reaction to the meeting? -- he said, "I was very pleased with the meeting and it was a very frank exchange of views." He was not commenting on what they may have said to you here.

Q What did he say when you showed him the wire copy of what the Council of Bishops said?

MR. NESSEN: He just read it and gave it back.

Q He didn't pipe that down in his office?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, when will they complete that survey that shows that you all would have a chance to carry the Northeast if you could cut into the Catholic vote?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any idea. Is that a Teeter poll?

Q I am not sure.

MR. NESSEN: If it is, the PFC will have to talk to you about it. I don't know. I heard Baker say on TV this morning that the polling was not completed yet.

Q Ron, I have two specific questions on abortion. As Commander-in-Chief, couldn't the President, if he were really all that opposed to abortions, just issue an edict and forbid them in all military hospitals except in the three cases, which he does?

MR. NESSEN: I am just about to step over the line of the extent of my knowledge. My understanding is -- and you really ought to check this out -- is that that was a very specific issue dealt with by the Supreme Court, but I am going to have to get somebody from --

Q And the second question, if you can get me an answer to that, does the President approve of the fact that current Government policy is that any Federal Government employee that has health insurance with the Federal Government can get an abortion upon demand and that the Federal Government insurance policy picks up 60 percent of that now? How does he feel about that specific question?

MR. NESSEN: I think it all falls into the same category that the bishops reported to you all, which is that the HEW programs, the military programs, the health insurance programs, the programs where Federal money is used for abortions, will be the subject of this study he has requested to make sure that only the minimum amount required by the Supreme Court is being spent.

Q Is the President not ready to endorse that amendment on the Hill, to ban funds for abortions, the impasse up there right now in Appropriations?

MR. NESSEN: Not specifically, no.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: He has undertaken the study which deals with the area of the Hyde amendment, and I just don't think he is ready to take a specific position on it until he sees the results of that study.

Q Could you draw a distinction, Ron? Did the President indicate to the bishops that he would seek a Constitutional amendment or that he would support a Constitutional amendment?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to ask what the exact wording was, but --

Q Do you know generally which is the case?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, but you know, on this issue -- of course, the President was a co-sponsor of the Constitutional amendment that we are talking about, back in 1973, in March, the so-called Whitehurst amendment, which perhaps some of you have seen. The President was one of the co-sponsors then, so, as I have said, his record in this is consistent and steady, unchanged over a course of years.

Q Would his lobbyists in Congress press to get one enacted there?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to find that out.

Q What was the President's reaction when the bishops told him they thought there was a better approach to this issue than the States' rights approach?

MR. NESSEN: I was not in the meeting, so I cannot give you his response to that.

Q Ron, what is meant by a frank exchange of views? In diplomatic parlance, that usually means "significant differences."

MR. NESSEN: Look, you know where the bishops stand. The President today, yesterday and every day for the last four or five years has had the same position on this issue. I don't know what sort of answer you are asking for.

Q Did he on February 3rd have a different position when he said he did not think a Constitutional amendment was appropriate, in the interview with Walter Cronkite?

MR. NESSEN: I know you read the second sentence of that same answer, right?

Q Which was, "If there was to be an amendment" --

MR. NESSEN: It should be one that restored to the States their authority to regulate abortion.

Q But the bottom line was he did not want one or did not think it was proper, right?

MR. NESSEN: That is not the way I read the interview.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:12 P.M. EDT)