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NEWS CONFERENCE

#581

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:45 A.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 16, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The Economic Policy Board did have its meeting today, postponed from the other day. It was for the purpose that I mentioned, which was to review at least some of the features of the tax bill. The President did not make any decisions there at the meeting.

Q Ron, you were sitting in on the whole meeting?

MR. NESSEN: John was.

Q Did the President make any comment about it at all that might be of interest to us?

MR. NESSEN: It was mostly an informal and discussion meeting and not a decision-making meeting.

Q Did they talk about tax breaks for college parents who have given to colleges that are non-public schools that he talked about last night?

MR. NESSEN: That is not in the bill.

Q I am sorry. No, I understand that.

MR. NESSEN: At 11:00, the President had a meeting with Ambassador Volpe and Jenò Paulucci. The purpose of this was to discuss the Italian earthquake. As you may know, Mr. Paulucci was in Italy earlier this month and before he went, the President asked him to make an assessment of the earthquake relief program and determine how the U.S. relief efforts were going and any suggestions he might have for improving them, and also, his more general impressions of the earthquake area and the general Italian situation.

So, just by way of background, the United States has provided Italy with \$25 million in earthquake relief assistance since the initial earthquake, which was on May 6th. In case you don't recall, an estimated 1,000 people were killed and about 70,000 were left homeless. I think you may recall that Vice President Rockefeller and the AID Administrator, Daniel Parker, went to Italy at the President's direction later in May to survey the damage and to recommend an American effort.

MORE

#581

There have been fresh tremors ever since May, the last of which were last weekend. The damage and deaths were not anywhere near as heavy as the initial earthquake on May 6th. So, that was the purpose of that.

Q Is the President thinking about proposing more aid, more quake relief money?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible.

Q Did Paulucci tell him more aid was needed?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend the meeting and I did not have time to talk to them since the meeting.

Q Could we find out what Mr. Volpe told the President about what you said was the general Italian situation?

MR. NESSEN: I will check with Volpe and Paulucci and see what we can tell you.

I think tonight you know the President is going to attend the Italian-American Foundation Bicentennial Tribute dinner. That is at the Washington Hilton. The President will be leaving the White House at 7:05. There will be a travel pool going with him and the President will make remarks at the dinner and then leave.

Q Ron, is that a change? You said he is going to attend it, but actually, is he?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a reception for head-table guests which he will attend, and then he will go to the head table. About 1,800 people will attend, and the Star Spangled Banner will be sung by Enzo Stuarti. The President will take his seat and will attend those opening ceremonies of the color guard, the national anthem and the invocation. Then, he will be introduced and he will speak shortly before 8:00.

Q Will he sit in the same chair that Carter sat in?

MR. NESSEN: I thought Carter was supposed to be there but apparently, he decided to delay his arrival so he wouldn't have to listen to the President.

Q Is that another flip-flop?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I don't expect we will have the remarks in advance. They will be relatively brief.

Q What does "relatively" mean?

MR. NESSEN: I would say five to ten minutes, but closer to five than to ten. The President is still working on them but he indicated that he would like to talk about some substantive issues involving --

Q Such as earthquake aid for Italy?

Q Involving Communism --

MR. NESSEN: He is still working on his remarks, so I don't have exactly what he is going to say.

Q At what time will they come, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Shortly before 8:00.

Q Could we get them by 7:30?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there will be an advance, Helen. I don't think so because 3:00 this afternoon is the time when he is going to sit down and really focus on finishing the speech. I will take a reading of that and see whether they are in finished enough form to hand out.

Q Ron, on the issue of earthquake aid, could I ask -- Dan sort of facetiously suggested -- is it possible that might be unveiled this evening?

MR. NESSEN: It is not planned to do anything like that.

Q Ron, you still have not answered my question about whether he is going to attend the dinner or not.

MR. NESSEN: The answer is he is going to attend to the extent of being there and seated at the head table for the opening ceremonies. Then he will speak and will leave. He will not eat there.

Q Why is that?

MR. NESSEN: Because he has to go from there to attend the reception for members of the Hispanic community and the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception afterward.

Q Why doesn't he have dinner with the Italians?

MR. NESSEN: Then he would miss the reception.

Q The Italian thing was scheduled long before this Hispanic thing.

MR. NESSEN: But he wants to do both and he is going to do both.

There is open press coverage.

Q Is this a change which you are telling us? Had he planned to do something more?

MR. NESSEN: He had not planned to attend the dinner at all from the beginning.

Q You asked us to assume that it is Carter who is avoiding a meeting with the President but why is it --

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not asking you to do that. I am not speaking for Carter here.

Q You said last night in the pool report that Carter backed out.

MR. NESSEN: I said it looks like he is backing out. That was offered as a personal observation.

Q My question is, with the President cutting out of the dinner early, isn't the President just as equally liable to the charge that he is trying to avoid Mn. Carter?

MR. NESSEN: The President has not planned to attend the whole dinner and he does want to get over and attend this other event.

Q Was the President not invited to the dinner?

MR. NESSEN: Let me see what he said in his letter to Paulucci, which I have here.

In his letter to Paulucci he did not discuss food. But, he likes Italian food.

Q Ron, on the earthquake aid, how much of that \$25 million has actually been spent? Do you know what has happened to the \$25 million? Has it all been spent? Is more needed?

MR. NESSEN: We have provided the money. We have given the money to the Italians. You would have to check with them on how they have used it. I know one thing, the Italians have decided to do is to put the emphasis on rebuilding homes, and whereas originally 70,000 people were homeless, they have put the initial emphasis on building homes and they have now housed 30,000 of the 70,000 who were without homes immediately after the earthquake, and I suspect some of the relief funds have gone for that.

Q When did the President put the appearance at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on the schedule?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q My recollection is when you handed out today's schedule in Ann Arbor yesterday that was not on it and that was subsequently added. Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: It was accidentally left off the printed schedule and I told the pool coming home last night that it had been accidentally left off. I don't know if the pool report reflected that or not, but I said it had been accidentally left off and I wanted them to know about it so they could catch up with the schedule. I didn't see that pool report, though.

Q Did you ever get straightened out on whether he was invited to the dinner tonight?

MR. NESSEN: No, we have not because -- he did not force his way to the dinner. He was invited to attend by Jen0 Paulucci. I know he was invited.

Q The point is, Ron, you were implying that Jimmy Carter is trying to avoid the President when it appears it is the other way around.

MR. NESSEN: No, I did not, Bob. I offered that as an offhand comment last night because last week I heard that Carter was going to come and then the President was going to come and they would be there at the same time. The next thing I heard was that Carter had decided to delay his arrival until after the time the President had departed.

Q When did the President decide to depart early?

MR. NESSEN: It has always been planned that he would leave after his remarks, that he would not stay for dinner.

Q It was always planned --

MR. NESSEN: -- that he would make remarks at the beginning and leave, that is correct.

Q Does the President not want to be there when Carter is?

MR. NESSEN: He would be delighted to be there when Carter is.

Q Why doesn't he stay?

MR. NESSEN: Because he does not want to miss the reception at the Shrine.

Q It is on the way back.

Q Why don't they go up there together afterwards? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Anyhow, they are going to meet next Thursday in Philadelphia.

Q Any details on the coverage of tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I was hoping somebody would ask that. There will be open coverage at the dinner.

Q He is not staying for the dinner.

MR. NESSEN: There will be open coverage of the President's remarks. The travel pool should plan to wear dark suits. It is a black tie dinner. Set-up time for of you who want to set up your cameras is before 6:00. In other words, at 6:00 they will close the doors and sweep the place so you should have your cameras in place by 6:00.

For those of you interested in such things, from the camera platform to the podium is 50 feet and there will be a mult for making recordings. After leaving the Hilton, the President will go to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which you know is on the grounds of Catholic University.

He will attend a reception being held for members of the Washington Hispanic Community. This reception follows a religious mass which is being held as part of the activities of National Hispanic Heritage Week, which is this.

Q Does the President speak Spanish?

MR. NESSEN: He does not. The President will make brief remarks at the reception.

Q Open or closed?

MR. NESSEN: There will be pool coverage of both the reception and his remarks at the reception. The reason for the pool coverage is because the space is limited.

Q Will he speak on abortion?

MR. NESSEN: No. the remarks really are brief and in keeping with the nature of the event, which is a reception following a religious mass.

I think the President will be back in the White House about 9:10 or 9:15, something like that.

Q Is there any connection between the morning's meeting on Italian affairs and the evening's speech?

MR. NESSEN: According to the briefing paper, the subjects of the meeting are to receive Paulucci's report on what he observed of the earthquake, to primarily talk about the earthquake and general matters in Italy as reported on by both Volpe and Paulucci. There is nothing in here about the dinner tonight.

Q Ron, has he been to Italy between his last visit here about ten days ago and today -- Paulucci, that is.

MR. NESSEN: He met with Paulucci on September 2 and then Paulucci went to Italy after the meeting of September 2.

Q At the President's behest?

MR. NESSEN: He was going there on his own, but when the President learned he was going there on his own, the President asked him to do certain chores for him in terms of making an assessment of the earthquake damage and the relief effort.

Now that we have plowed our way through that, the rest of the schedule you have seen. There are no changes in that.

Q How about the Governors?

MR. NESSEN: What Governors?

Q Southern chairmen?

MR. NESSEN: Are you interested in talking to them afterward?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I can make them aware of your interest and see if we can arrange for them to come out to the driveway and talk to you.

Q It is raining. That is especially fitting.

Q What about coverage for the reception? Is that closed?

MR. NESSEN: The Young Presidents reception?

Q No, the Southern chairmen.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it will be closed.

Q How about the Young Presidents?

MR. NESSEN: That is also closed.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: It is just a brief social reception for members and their wives.

Q We have been allowed to cover social receptions.

MR. NESSEN: There is no plan for this one.

Q Is this because it is political?

MR. NESSEN: It is not political.

Q Then why can't we cover it?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it. Currently there are no plans to but let me check and see what the reasoning behind that is.

Q Now that negotiations are not going on anymore, are you willing to say anything about the auto strike and the impact it might have?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not.

Q What is the excuse now for not talking about it? You would not when the negotiations were going on.

MR. NESSEN: The President believes in letting the collective bargaining process resolve the differences.

Q You were going to check on whether the CEA or anybody in the Administration had been doing a study of the impact of the strike. Can you tell us anything on that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not got anything on that, no.

Q Has the President discussed with Leo Cherne the loss of the little green book?

Q You don't seem to be as concerned about this strike as you have been about past strikes. Are you downplaying this purposely?

MR. NESSEN: I am not up-playing it or downplaying it. You asked me whether the President had any comment and I said only that he -- as with all labor disputes, contract disputes, rather -- believes in letting the collective bargaining process resolve the differences.

I have a question hanging about the little green book, from Helen. What was your question again?

Q Has the President discussed the loss of this book, and is he going to keep Cherne in his present position and what are the developments?

MR. NESSEN: As I understand it, the whole matter is being reviewed and while it is, I just don't have anything to say on it.

Q Being reviewed by whom?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is it is being reviewed at the Justice Department.

Q Ron, on Tuesday you said that you would check to see whether the Economic Policy Board has made any study or analysis -- or whatever you want to call it -- of the economic impact of a strike against the Ford Motor Company.

Have you checked? Has the EPB done any such study?

MR. NESSEN: They have not done any such study. It is difficult to gauge the economic impact when you don't know the length of the strike.

Q I would assume -- perhaps I am wrong -- that they would make a study examining various scenarios.

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, as far as I know, they have not done an estimate of any economic impact of the strike.

Q Has anyone in the Government, as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: I can't speak for anyone in the Government.

Q As far as you know.

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, I just don't know beyond what goes on in the White House.

Q I would like to know -- to follow up on the green book -- has there been any personal involvement on the part of the President? When did he first learn about it since this occurred last March, and so forth? Has he been aware all along?

MR. NESSEN: He learned about it several months ago and has been kept abreast of developments.

Q Did he learn about it before or after he named Mr. Cherne to the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the exact date was.

Q It was February.

Q Is he concerned?

MR. NESSEN: The matter is being reviewed and I don't have anything to say while it is.

Q Did he direct the review?

MR. NESSEN: No. I believe the review got underway in the normal procedure of things.

Q After Cherne reported it to the Justice Department?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know the details and it is under review. I can't say anything more while it is under review.

Q When he learned about it is sort of crucial. Could you find out for us when he learned about it?

MR. NESSEN: I know it was several months ago. I could pin it down better than that. I will check.

Q Also, what happened when the President found out. What did he do? What did he say? What did he think?

MR. NESSEN: He has just been kept abreast of it, Helen, and it is under review.

Q Ron, you said it is being reviewed by the Justice Department?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Do you think it is also being reviewed by the Central Intelligence Agency?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know enough about the details, myself.

Q Ron, I apologize if this question has been asked before, but last week, the President, when he was speaking to the B'nai B'rith, suggested that he favored some kind of anti-boycott legislation. We tried to get Mr. Baker, his campaign chairman, to explain what kind of anti-boycott legislation the President favors.

MR. NESSEN: Why would you ask Jim Baker?

Q Because he was available and he is the campaign chairman.

MR. NESSEN: A target of opportunity.

Q We thought possibly this was a political maneuver on the President's part and Mr. Baker was absolutely astounded to learn that the President favored anti-boycott legislation since he opposed it on the Hill. Could you tell us what kind of anti-boycott legislation he now favors?

MR. NESSEN: Do you have the transcript of what the President said?

Q At the B'nai B'rith?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I am sure it is available in your office.

MR. NESSEN: What he said was -- he went on and talked about the whole boycott situation and what he had done about it and at one point, he said something about "legislation if necessary," and that is an unchanged position, that the steps he has taken, steps to deal with this practice, those steps are working and somewhere down the line, if they don't work fully and adequately, at that point, he would then support some kind of legislation, if necessary, to deal with the **problem**.

Q He does not favor anti-boycott legislation as of this moment?

MR. NESSEN: He has not changed his position at all, Bob.

Q There is some in the tax bill pending and apparently, there has been no decision on vetoing or not vetoing the tax bill, right?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q What does he think about the provision in the tax bill that would deny tax breaks to people who honor the boycott?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what specific wording was finally agreed to in that area. I know that some versions of that were opposed in testimony by Administration witnesses on grounds that the President, last November, took action to deal with the boycott.

Q Did that come up today in the review?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend that entire meeting. I will have to ask, John.

Q Ron, can I go back to the auto strike for a minute? While the President was in his residence yesterday afternoon at Ann Arbor -- that period when you said old friends would drop in on him -- did he by any chance see anybody connected with either the Ford Motor Company or with the United Auto Workers?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. I will check and see who came to see him but I am not aware of any plan to do that.

Q Ron, as long as we returned to the Ford strike, if my memory is correct, this is the largest -- in terms of number of workers out -- the largest strike in the United States in six years. Does the President have any comment whatever, recognizing his economic philosophy and all the rest of it -- nevertheless, I think it is the largest strike in the United States in six years -- does the President of the United States have any comment whatever to offer to reporters and from them to the public on this strike?

MR. NESSEN: I think, Jim, he has commented each time he has been asked about this over the past few days. I have commented on it each time I have been asked about it over the past few days and the comment is always the same, because it is his view, and that is that the collective bargaining process should be allowed to work, and it is working.

Q Michigan is one of the few States where published polls show Ford ahead of Carter. Is there any concern if the strike goes on close to the election, or beyond, that it will hurt him politically in Michigan?

MR. NESSEN: Lou, I don't think I should comment, or speculate, really, on how long a strike will go on and what, if any, political effect it would have. I just don't think it is the right thing to do.

Q Ron, could you tell us, and if you don't have it, could you get it for us, what kind of reaction has been coming into the White House on Secretary Kissinger's trip to Africa?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, coming into the White House? Do you mean in the way of letters and mail and so forth?

Q And telegrams.

MR. NESSEN: Let's see what the last mail report shows. This was for last week. A minor amount of mail, 129 letters on the overall performance of Secretary Kissinger, not broken down by any specific area.

Q Was it pro or con?

MR. NESSEN: It is not broken down. The memo reporting on last week's mail count simply says there were 129 letters commenting on Secretary of State Kissinger.

Q Have you followed that? Is that a lot of letters?

MR. NESSEN: 129 letters. For instance, there were 2573 letters asking for birthday and anniversary messages, so that will give you an idea.

Q My point is, do you normally get that many letters on Kissinger in a week?

MR. NESSEN: I would have to look back on previous week reports and see how that ranks.

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Q Ron, would the President like to see the abortion amendment stay in the current bill that is being considered on the Hill?

MR. NESSEN: We have not seen the final wording of that other than what the newspaper reported this morning. It was not clear to me even from the newspaper what the language is and until we have had a chance to see what the precise language is, we don't have any comment on it.

Q Let me ask you a related question. After the President told the Catholic bishops that he had directed Mr. Cannon to make a study seeking to restrict Federal aid for abortion only to those programs required by law --

MR. NESSEN: And court decisions.

Q -- and court decisions required by the law. One or more womens' organizations stated that the President's position was unconstitutional in that it was a Fourteenth Amendment deprivation of due process, discrimination against a very large class of citizens; that is to say, women.

What is the President's or the White House response to the charge that his instructions to Mr. Cannon are to accomplish an unconstitutional purpose?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any response to that. I did not see the remarks. I just don't have any comment other than the fact that this morning when I told the President I anticipated some questions based on the action in Congress concerning the amendment, he said, "Where is that study that I asked for?" He said, "I want it without delay." So, that was relayed then to the Domestic Council and I take it from that that he wants it soon.

Q That study that Cannon is doing, that the Domestic Council is doing, will it go into the constitutional legal questions of what the President can and can't do in this area?

MR. NESSEN: I think when I told you, Jim, about how the request was worded it seemed to me the wording was that he wants the study done of various programs of the Federal Government, various funds that are used for abortions, reviewed to make sure that the spending is kept to the minimum required by law and court decisions. Court decisions I think go to constitutional questions.

Q Ron, there was a news report about 15 months ago to the effect that a similar study was being carried out then by the Domestic Council. What was the result of that one and why is there need for another one?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of such a prior study and Jim Cannon has never mentioned to me that there was prior study.

Q Ron, you added "by law" today in this. You previously only referred to this Supreme Court decision.

MR. NESSEN: No, I think Jim was quoting back to me --

Q I happened to be reading it. He said, "in the Counsel's Office to undertake to make a study to make sure Federally financed abortions were kept to the minimum required by court decisions and law."

Q Why are you adding "and law"?

MR. NESSEN: I don't tend to change anything that I said the other day, but I think court decisions deal with whether programs are being run according to the law, it seems to me.

Q Why does the President oppose abortion that is sought by women who simply seek to not have an unwanted child?

MR. NESSEN: Why are we having a philosophical discussion today when nothing new has happened in this area except the President was asked where his study is.

Q There has never been any reason why the President in some way wanted to minimize the amount of abortions that take place. Why is it?

MR. NESSEN: I think what he said before, Pye-- and I will just get out the transcripts of what he said before, including yesterday to the students and let you read it.

Q Has the President been in touch with Dole at all in view of the stories --

MR. NESSEN: He saw him on Sunday.

Q There have been a lot of critical stories both ways.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen any of those.

Q You haven't seen any stories?

MR. NESSEN: You started mentioning some to me yesterday but I have not seen any. What stories are you talking about?

Q That he is not happy with the way things are going; they have bad organization; bad coordination.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any of that. As far as I know, the President told him last Saturday or Sunday, whenever it was -- and many of you were present -- that he was very pleased with Senator Dole's activities and campaigning.

Q Ron, has anybody been detailed to Dole from the White House?

Q Does the President agree with Secretary General Luns' proposal yesterday that the Russians don't want a SALT agreement until after the Presidential election?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will have to ask the President his views on that subject. Your question was, has anybody been detailed to Dole from the White House?

Q Have any additional White House aides been detailed?

MR. NESSEN: Larry Speakes has gone over there and a couple of press advance people have left the White House and gone over there.

Q No one from the speechwriting office has gone over and if not, are there plans to send someone over?

MR. NESSEN: A speechwriter?

Q From the speechwriting office.

MR. NESSEN: Do you know a name? I just don't keep up with it that closely. Peter Wallison has gone over there from the Vice President's staff.

Q I would like to return to a question that Ed asked earlier about the marked difference, or perhaps the marked indifference, in the attitude of the White House toward this Ford strike as opposed to previous strikes which we have discussed here.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the basis of that is.

Q It just seems there is a marked difference and a marked indifference to the strike at Ford Motor plants in the White House attitude here.

MR. NESSEN: I think if you check the record, Walt, you will see this is the attitude that the President always takes because it reflects his view that --

Q I understand that, but you always come out and say the President is taking an active interest in keeping posted on the strike and is concerned about its long-range economic impact. You have not said any of that impact. You have not even said the President is interested in the outcome of the strike.

Q Particularly now when Greenspan admits we are in a pause in the recovery.

Q In any event, is the President even in touch with the Labor Department as to what is going on in that strike?

MR. NESSEN: He is kept informed of all economic developments.

Q By whom?

MR. NESSEN: By his Economic Policy Board or Alan Greenspan or --

Q What have they told him about the Ford strike?

MR. NESSEN: It just started the other day, Walt, last night or the night before last.

Q And no long-range prospectus on the economic effects if it lasts one week as opposed to two weeks, as opposed --

MR. NESSEN: As I told Jim when he asked about it, to my knowledge, the EPB has'nt done that work.

Q They did it very quickly on the vegetable strike in California earlier this year.

MR. NESSEN: I have given you the President's view every day this week that has been asked about. Even over the weekend, I was asked about it. The President's view is the same.

Q Ron, is Senator Mansfield going to carry out any message or errand for the President on the trip to China?

MR. NESSEN: The President expects to call Senator Mansfield today -- or may have already called him -- just to wish him well and to note the fact this is probably his last day in which he will attend a session of the Senate as a Member because by the time he gets back from China the session will probably be adjourned. Senator Mansfield will carry a verbal greeting to the Chinese: "Best wishes from the President."

Q To the Chinese Government?

MR. NESSEN: To the Chinese officials he meets.

Q Anything in particular?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is an informal and verbal greeting.

Q Has Schlesinger been asked for his report on China yet?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he is not back yet. The last I saw, he was setting out to visit the provinces.

Q But you have a liaison in Peking and he, in turn, hasn't even contacted Schlesinger yet on it.

MR. NESSEN: I think last week when I was asked, I indicated that the appropriate people would certainly want to talk to Jim Schlesinger when he got back.

Q Has he been contacted through the Liaison Office?

MR. NESSEN: I will check and find out.

Q Did the President make any further comments to you, to anybody you are aware of, about that firecracker last night?

MR. NESSEN: No. He hasn't mentioned it.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:20 P.M. EDT)