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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 9:05 P.M. CDT

OCTOBER 8, 1976

FRIDAY

(Lawton, Oklahoma)

MR. NESSEN: What we are doing here is releasing a statement that is embargoed for 6:00 p.m. tomorrow night, as well as a fact sheet that is embargoed.

Q Eastern or Central Time?

MR. NESSEN: Eastern.

The reason I am doing it tonight is really nothing more than the fact that we leave fairly early here in the morning and there would not be time to do it in the morning, and we move along at a pretty good rate tomorrow, so it is really pretty much of a convenience so we can get this done and in the can before we start moving tomorrow.

The debate on foreign and defense policy revealed a number of fundamental contradictions and inconsistencies in Mr. Carter's position. In addition, he simply dodged straight answers to many questions. Therefore, we know almost nothing more about Mr. Carter's foreign policy and defense positions than we did before the debate.

Mr. Carter's rhetorical assertion of toughness toward the Soviet Union cannot be reconciled with his intention to cut the defense budget by billions of dollars, to withdraw U.S. troops from overseas and to scrap major weapons such as the B-1 bomber.

Mr. Carter's professed wish to strengthen foreign alliances clashes with his stated views on accepting Communists in European governments, withdrawal of U.S. troops and his high-handed attitude toward dealing with our allies on nuclear proliferation.

On Thursday, Mr. Carter told a group of labor leaders that he made no mistakes in the debate. That is not true. In his 18 opportunities to speak during the debate, Mr. Carter made at least 14 errors.

This is a detailed fact sheet listing the factual errors and misrepresentations made by Mr. Carter either from ignorance of the facts or deliberate misstatements. I can give you several examples from this fact sheet.

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Mr. Carter said during the debate, "As a matter of fact, I have never advocated a cut of \$15 billion in our defense budget." The facts are the Savannah Morning News, on March 18, 1975, in a story by Richard Green, quoted Mr. Carter as telling the Savannah Rotary Club: "The Federal budget could and should be cut, especially the defense budget. Approximately \$15 billion could be cut from the defense budget and not weaken the Nation's military capability."

On March 20, 1975, the Los Angeles Times reported that Mr. Carter told a Beverly Hills news conference that "he thinks the Ford defense budget for this year could be cut by about \$15 billion without sacrificing national security."

This week, after the debate, the reporter for the Los Angeles Times confirmed that Mr. Carter had indeed made that comment on a \$15 billion defense budget cut.

Mr. Carter said in the debate, on page 2 of the transcript, "Our country is not strong any more."

On page 25 of the transcript, he said, "I think militarily we are as strong as any nation on earth." Obviously, those statements are contradictory.

Mr. Carter said during the debate, "I have never advocated a Communist Government for Italy. That would be a ridiculous thing for anyone to do who wanted to be President of this country."

In the European edition of Newsweek Magazine, on May 10, 1976, Mr. Carter was quoted as saying "It may be that we would be better off having an Italian Government that might be comprised at least partially of Communists, tied in with the Western world, rather than driven into the Soviet orbit irrevocably."

During the debate, Mr. Carter said, "As a matter of fact, Iran is going to get 80 F-14s before we even meet our own Air Force order for F-14s." The facts are that the United States Air Force has never ordered any F-14s. The F-14 is a Navy plane. F-14 deliveries have been and are on schedule. The delivery, divided between the United States and Iran, meets the U.S. Navy's programmed requirement for the F-14.

The fact sheet which we will have here in about 20 minutes has an additional list of things.

Q Ron, we would like to ask you a couple of questions, if we could.

MR. NESSEN: I think it is probably not fair, Phil, because a lot of people are not here.

Q I think everybody is here.

Q Ron, it is a briefing.

Q And there will be a transcript.

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I said I would come and read this for the convenience of the cameras.

Q Can we ask a question about the Washington Post story?

MR. NESSEN: Which one is that?

Q The one about the --

MR. NESSEN: Look, I don't think it is fair to do a briefing. The pool, for instance, is over at the --

Q No, they are not. They were brought back here an hour ago.

MR. NESSEN: Well, since we didn't announce a briefing, I don't think we should have a briefing.

Q I assume you don't want to answer questions, then.

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I indicated I would come out here as a convenience because of the busy day tomorrow.

Q This would be convenient, too.

Q You are not doing it as a convenience. You are doing it because you want to impart some information on the President's behalf. That is why you are out here. Now, we want to ask you some questions which you are paid by the taxpayers to do. If you would do that, we would appreciate it.

MR. NESSEN: Well, Phil, I don't think we ought to have a briefing at this hour with your colleagues --

Q Just say you don't want to have a briefing.

Q When would you like to hold a briefing?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is not fair to the people who are not here, and they will come back and they will say, "You did not announce the briefing and then you held a briefing and we missed the story and our colleagues got the story." I don't think it is fair to the people who aren't here to do that since no briefing was announced.

What was announced was that we would issue this, which we are, and because we will be moving fast tomorrow and will not have time to do this that I would read it tonight so we could get it done before we started traveling.

Q Could we make this an expanded pool?

MR. NESSEN: Joe, I don't think it is fair to the people who did not expect a briefing, went to dinner or other places and will miss whatever is said here.

Q We could embargo it until tomorrow morning.

Q Ron, since some of us are here, could we just, on a one-on-one relationship, ask you a few questions?

MR. NESSEN: You know, I do that everyday all day.

Q Ron, did the President apologize to the Polish-American Congress fellow in Chicago?

MR. NESSEN: Wait, I don't understand what we are doing here.

Q One question and then go out the door. Did he apologize?

MR. NESSEN: Why do we have all the --

Q Why are you so anxious to get out the door?

MR. NESSEN: I was doing what Ann suggested, which was standing around and answering questions.

Q You have a question and it --

Q Ron, step up to the mike so we can hear you.

MR. NESSEN: Look, people that are not here will come back and say why did you hold a briefing and give these people these stories, which they have run in their papers and run on their networks and we were not here.

Q Why are you evading questions?

Q Every major newspaper and every network and every wire service is here. You have been asked a specific question about a conversation of the President who you work for and you have evaded the answer. Why?

MR. NESSEN: I am not, but I --

Q Can you tell us how that phone call came about since those of us who were on Air Force One were kind of embarrassed about --

MR. NESSEN: If we are going to have a briefing, I think it is not fair to the people who are not here. I feel a great obligation to those people. They will be mad at me. Has it ever happened to you that I had a briefing when some of you were not here, and do you remember what your feelings were and what you said to me? Phil, you have been in that position.

Q We could embargo it for tomorrow morning.

Q Ron, I have heard you were going to appear here as the Press Secretary of the President of the United States at 9:00. We are asking you a question not about that statement. We are asking you a question about something you did not tell the press crew about on Air Force One.

MR. NESSEN: Which was what?

Q Mazewski.

Q We want to know --

MR. NESSEN: Okay. Why don't we go to a regular briefing. You are all witnesses that the people who are not here will come back and yell and scream because they missed the story.

Q Ron, before all this, can we have it on record ABC is not running the sound system?

MR. NESSEN: The first question was about Aloisius Mazewski.

Q How did that phone call come about, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know all the details of it, Annie. It lasted several minutes. Mazewski was in Chicago and I did not listen in on the conversation, so I don't know what was said. He is the President of the Polish-American Congress.

Q Did the President apologize to this guy?

MR. NESSEN: Dave, since I didn't hear either end of the conversation, I don't know what was said, but I am certainly not going to contradict Mr. Mazewski's account of the phone conversation.

Q Is it your understanding that he characterized it as an apology?

MR. NESSEN: Somebody read me some wire copy.

Q And you have no quarrel with that?

MR. NESSEN: I have no quarrel with however Mr. Mazewski is characterizing the phone conversation.

Q Has he phoned any other Polish-American leaders that you know of?

MR. NESSEN: No, not that I know of.

Q The next time you get a chance, would you ask Dick or Terry or whoever and find out whether there have been other phone calls?

MR. NESSEN: I will, Annie.

Q Does he plan to call?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Is there some reason why you chose not to tell us about this?

MR. NESSEN: Only that I needed to get the spelling and the length of the call, which I did as soon as we got to the grounds, and I came to the press bus and I announced it.

Q This was after it had already run on the wires and we had to go individually to Cheney to find out.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the timing was. I got the process of where he was, the length of the call, the spelling of the name and so forth as soon as we got to the ground.

Q Did you know about it before Air Force One touched down?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't, Phil.

Q May I ask a question about the Washington Post story about the audit? Are you calling for an investigation of which Carter supporter leaked this material?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not, Joe.

Q Could I ask a question about the substance of the story? As I understand it, the Wall Street Journal the otherday made a statement that a certain amount of items of clothes--in the neighborhood of \$600--was brought from a certain account in Michigan. The question is, were there any political contributions put into this account for which the clothes were later purchased?

MR. NESSEN: This is a report that was issued two and a half years ago. These audits were reviewed two and a half years ago -- over two and a half years ago -- by the House Judiciary Subcommittee. I have got their report in my office and can read you what their conclusions were, but to paraphrase it, it was after reviewing the audit they found no reason to have any questions about the President's past income tax record.

All these facts came out at that time. In fact, somebody showed me a Jack Anderson column that ran in April of 1974 in which this entire story was told and it was used by Anderson in a column to demonstrate the honesty of the President. When somebody called me the other night and read me part of the Wall Street Journal story they got two paragraphs into it and I said, "I know that story because I wrote it when I was at NBC." So, none of the facts are new. The report is not new. The audit is not new, and the study of the audit by the House Judiciary Committee is not new and I just don't see the purpose of commenting on a two and a half year old report that has already been written about and reviewed and passed on by the Judiciary Committee.

Q Your answer reminds me of what you say Jimmy Carter does on the debates. He does not answer the question.

MR. NESSEN: The question was something about were funds used --

Q The question was were any political contributions either from individuals or from anyone else, put into this account in Michigan from which clothes were later purchased?

MR. NESSEN: Joe, I have not seen the audit.

Q The story said that.

MR. NESSEN: The House Judiciary Committee did and concluded -- I will give you the exact quote if you are interested -- that there was no problem with the President's tax records.

Q That audit may be two and a half years old, but has the Watergate Special Prosecutor in the last few days asked the White House for more information to assist his investigation on this matter?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, Charlie.

Q Have you discussed this matter, Ron, with the President since the Wall Street Journal story appeared?

MR. NESSEN: He knows about the Wall Street Journal story and the Washington Post story.

Q Have you discussed it with him?

MR. NESSEN: Of course.

Q Ron, may I go back, about whether or not the Watergate Special Prosecutor has contacted the White House in the last few days? You said not that you know of.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Have you talked with the President on that very question?

MR. NESSEN: We have been moving rather fast and I have not had a chance to sit down and really go into any further questions about the Watergate Special Prosecutor.

Q I am confused. I thought you said you had discussed it with the President.

MR. NESSEN: I was asked if I had discussed the Wall Street Journal story and the Washington Post story, and I said I did. Then Charlie asked whether the Special Watergate Prosecutor asked the White House for any of these tax records, if I remember the question.

Q Information related to this.

MR. NESSEN: And I said not to my knowledge. Somebody said, "Have you discussed the Special Prosecutor's investigation with the President?" And I said we have been moving rather fast these past few days and since there have been no new developments I have not talked to him about that.

Q How many days are you talking about now?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dick.

Q All week long?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I forget the last time I talked to him about it. Nothing new has happened.

Q Has the Special Prosecutor contacted anyone at the White House since Tuesday of last week?

MR. NESSEN: No, not to my knowledge.

Q For any reason?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge.

Q Ron, could we get a request in now? We would be interested in knowing whether you would announce or let us know if such a contact was made and when it was made?

MR. NESSEN: I know of nothing new in that case.

Q That is what I am saying. Could I put in a request now that if you could check into that and let us know?

MR. NESSEN: I will see whether there has been any change.

Q Ron, it was reported tonight that Calhoun appeared before the Grand Jury for two hours and he was under grant of immunity. Is the White House aware of this?

MR. NESSEN: This is the first I have heard of it. I did not watch TV tonight and this is the first I have heard of it.

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Q Ron, last week when the President had reporters into his office and talked about this he said he had given instructions that no aide was to talk to the Watergate Prosecutor or the Department of Justice because it would be misconstrued. Wouldn't you know if there was a change?

MR. NESSEN: I said not to my knowledge. To my knowledge, the situation has not changed.

Q Ron, can you tell us anything more about these prospects for Presidential action on meat import quotas?

MR. NESSEN: As I told the pool on the plane, he does have some documents and material on the issue, and I don't expect him to make or announce a decision tonight. It is possible that we will have a decision relatively soon.

Q Do you expect a decision before we get back to Washington?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't tell you, Russ.

Q How many telegrams has the White House received on the Eastern European comments?

MR. NESSEN: I have not made a check.

Q Ron, is there any particular reason why the President singled out Poland as the nation to defend in his Eastern European case? What about Hungary or Czechoslovakia or Eastern Germany?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the transcript in front of me. I believe he began by talking about Poland because I think a number of the stories have focused on Poland. I think the first question the other night at the briefing that Brent and Dick and the others gave -- the first question was how many divisions are based in Poland, so I think a certain amount of the focus has been on Poland. And I think that is probably why he began by talking about Poland.

Further down -- I don't have the transcript in front of me -- but a few sentences later, he referred to Soviet divisions in other countries.

Q Everybody concentrates on the Polish. Are they just the most vocal ethnic group in this conflict?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I suppose for the same reason the first question at the briefing the other night was how many divisions are in Poland. It is one of the countries in Eastern Europe whose circumstances are of interest to reporters, to wit the question and to the President.

Q It is not a country that has the most obvious case of Russian domination, if you want to use the word. Places like Hungary or Czechoslovakia, where there are Russian troops --

MR. NESSEN: I can get a transcript and read you that section.

Q I have the transcript.

Q It doesn't mention -- I just wonder why the President has avoided mention of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Eastern Germany?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he has avoided mentioning it. He did refer today to the occupation of other countries as well as Poland.

Q What is the Presidential reaction to Jimmy Carter's reaction to him to come forward with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth for the use of campaign funds?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Phil, the House Judiciary Committee, under Chairman Rodino, two and a half years ago, reviewed those audits. I do have the report in my office and will read you its conclusions if you prefer. I suppose I will read you those conclusions.

We do have Mr. Greener here who comes from a slightly different perspective who could speak to you.

MR. GREENER: In answer to your question, the PFC does call for Governor Carter to at long last release his 1970 funds which he said he was going to release. And we can't but wonder, since he announced it last week, what he has been doing with them all week.

Q That is your reaction to what he had to say?

MR. GREENER: I didn't react to his statement. I just wanted to put that out.

Q Ron, does the President have any feeling about the momentum of his campaign during this past week?

MR. NESSEN: I have not really talked to him about the momentum of the campaign.

Q You mean he hasn't said he is concerned about it or he is satisfied with it or thrilled with it or whatever?

MR. NESSEN: I think he talked publicly about it. I have not heard anything privately that he has not said publicly.

Q Ron, could you characterize the President's campaign at this point after several problems, let's say, over the last week?

MR. NESSEN: I think you probably ought to talk to the political folks. Jim Baker, I guess, is on the trip, and you will have a chance to talk to them.

Q You don't want to characterize it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to give you the overnight from here, Dick.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: Because I am not the expert on politics. Bill Greener is.

Can we ask Bill?

Q How would you characterize this week as a week in the President's activities? How would you say this week went for the President?

MR. GREENER: I will be happy to give it to you after I have talked to Baker and Spencer.

Q How would you characterize it as spokesman?

MR. GREENER: I would characterize it as a necessity for me to talk to Spencer and Baker to get some facts.

Q When did you talk to the President about the Wall Street Journal story?

MR. NESSEN: It is always my policy -- I don't think it is of much interest, the timetable of my conversations with the President on this or other things.

Q You told me Thursday morning you had not talked to him, so was it after --

MR. NESSEN: It must have been. If it wasn't before, it must have been after.

Q This morning, in referring to Governor Carter, President Ford said he does not make a statement one day and apologize for it the next. Apparently, though, this conversation with the Polish leader -- if what the Polish leader said afterward is correct, and you are not finding any fault with it -- that is exactly what he has done. Would you respond to that and tell us whether or not you think so?

MR. NESSEN: I would not go anywhere near that one. (Laughter)

Q Where do you see a difference between what Carter has done and what the President has done?

MR. NESSEN: I have never been in the business of interpreting the news, Don, so I will let you handle that aspect of it. I just give it out. You can do what you want with it after you get it.

Q Who went over the transcripts looking for inconsistencies or errors?

MR. NESSEN: And who paid for the time and how much time did it take?

Q Right.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I would have to sort that out.

Q Did the President realize during the debate the F-14 was a Navy plane and not an Air Force plane?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure he did.

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Q Ron, you may have commented on this in the past, but to bring things up to date, would you say that the President has never spent campaign contributions for anything other than campaign expenses?

MR. NESSEN: Russ, I have said this a couple of times in the past couple of weeks in relation to several different items, but I see no reason to stand here and make an assertion about a charge that to my knowledge has not been made by anybody.

The tax returns were audited and the audits were reviewed by Peter Rodino's House Judiciary Committee two and a half years ago. I will show you what they concluded after they reviewed the audits. Nothing has changed to my knowledge, in two and a half years since those audits were reviewed.

Q Let me ask another question about the telephone call. Can you say anything about how it was set up? Did the President have reason to believe that Mr. Mazewski would be at home when he telephoned?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure he was home. I don't know where he was and I don't know the background on the phone call.

Q This was a phone in the President's compartment?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Color or white?

MR. NESSEN: White princess.

Q Has this been a plus campaign or a minus campaign out in California?

MR. NESSEN: I will get Stu and Jim Baker and Bill Greener to talk to you after they have concluded their analysis. I know they will want to share it with you.

Q When?

MR. GREENER: I will check and see if we can do it tomorrow. As you said, the schedule doesn't have much time for briefings.

Q Off the top of your head, you couldn't say?

MR. NESSEN: I never say anything off the top of my head. I get in too much trouble that way.

Q Did he make points out there?

MR. NESSEN: Jim Baker and Stu Spencer and Bill will report to you.

Q Ron, what plans does the President have after 7:05?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. He might take a shower and put his feet up, watch TV and have some dinner.

Q Does it look like he is going to go home right after church Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: It is not entirely clear. I don't know of any events right after church, but I don't absolutely want to say there won't be.

Q Has he ever said why he extended the trip a day?

MR. NESSEN: He was invited to attend the services at that church and wanted to.

Q By who, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: By Reverend Criswell, as far as I know.

Q Ron, this fact sheet and rebuttal that you are issuing tonight, why did it take three days for you to come up with all these rebuttals in a debate you -- (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: There were so many errors it took a long time to get them together.

Q Ron, do you really think this briefing is fair inasmuch as some of our colleagues are not here? (Laughter)

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 9:40 P.M. CDT)