

**The original documents are located in Box 15, folder “Networks (ABC and NBC)” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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February 3, 1975

Dear Les:

I feel strongly enough about the events of last Friday night to make a few comments on paper as an old friend rather than as the Press Secretary to the President.

I don't feel it is any of my business to make any comment on the ethics of using old, unrelated film or unrelated documents stored in an entirely different place to illustrate a story about very specific Nixon documents involved in a court case. I would bet that 99 percent of your viewers thought they were seeing the documents Carl Stern was talking about and I'd bet few, if any, of your viewers picked up the distinction Carl made with the addition of two words to his script on the second show. But, again, that's an ethical call you have to make.

However, the matter does involve the White House because your use of old and unrelated film, without saying clearly that it was old and unrelated film, could give the Nixon lawyers the impression that we had violated a court order forbidding any film or pictures of the Nixon tapes and documents. As soon as the legal counsel's office here saw your TV piece, they realized we were in for trouble based on their experience with the attitude of the Nixon lawyers over the past five months. My phone calls to NBC were not concerned with the facts of Carl's story or his interpretation. My phone calls to NBC requesting a brief clarifying statement from the White House at the end of your show were simply to head off what we anticipated would be legal difficulties with the Nixon lawyers. It seemed to me that since NBC Nightly News had thrown us into those difficulties through no fault of our own, we had the right to try to avoid those difficulties while there was still time on the same program.

I must say that I found a very low level of responsiveness in the Washington bureau. Herb Dudnick's first reaction was to laugh off my phone call with a sarcastic reply to my question of what film had been used to illustrate the Nixon tapes and documents story. And the attitude of both Herb and Frank Jordan seemed to be how



to hold me off long enough to get both shows finished without having NBC Nightly News publicly make a clarification of what it had shown.

Anyhow, the end of the episode was that the Nixon lawyers were verbally assured by the White House that the film shown on NBC was not taken in violation of the court order and the Nixon lawyers seemed to accept that.

Les, let me make one observation as a friend and not as a Presidential flak. In the last two or three weeks my dealings with NBC News have involved a John Chancellor question to the President on an explosive issue which was based entirely on a copyboy's garbled memo after talking to a Major at the Pentagon; three energy stories on the NBC Nightly News in which the President's energy program was seriously misrepresented; and then the Friday night episode in which unrelated film was used to illustrate the Nixon tapes and documents story without alerting the viewers to this. As someone who still has great affection for NBC News and the people who work there, it strikes me that the NBC News reputation for accuracy and fairness is becoming slightly frayed. And I must say with reluctance and regret that there seems to be unwillingness to admit inaccuracies and unfairness when they are called to the attention of the network.

I hope this letter does not sound Zieglerian, it truly is based on my fondness for you and my former colleagues at NBC and does not come from my new position at the White House. Maybe some night when you are here or I'm there, we will have a chance to sit down over a drink and talk about these things because, after all, you and I are still in the same business, which is getting as much accurate information to the American people as we can.

Sincerely,

Ron Nessen  
Press Secretary to the President

Mr. Les Crystal  
Executive Producer  
NBC Nightly News  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, New York 10020



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Connie,

what do you think about making

a file on each network....

for things like the attached....

Good idea

P

We could have 1 gray file  
folder called "networks"  
3 smaller folders in it for

ABC

NBC

BS



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Ron Nessen  
Press Secretary to the President

Mr. Les Crystal  
Executive Producer  
NBC Nightly News  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, New York 10020



10-24-75

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Rona

You might want ~~to~~ to mention at the start of today's briefing that today is Steve Bell's last day of covering the White House full time for ABC. A week from Monday he will make his debut on the new AM America show which will be called Good Morning, America. Peter Jennings will be going to Europe and work out of London.

JWH

(George Watson will replace Steve)

