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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

HUGH SCOTT

SENATOR FROM THE  
STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

AND

JOHN RHODES

REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE  
STATE OF ARIZONA

THE BRIEFING ROOM

9:49 A.M. EDT

MR. HUSHEN: Good morning.

Ron will be down in a minute and we will fill you in on his aspects of it.

The meeting lasted approximately one hour and 40 minutes. We have the minority leaders, Congressman Rhodes and Senator Scott, here to brief you on what transpired.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: There were three subjects considered. I will take up two of them and leave one for Senator Scott.

The consumer legislation was discussed, and the President made it very plain that he is not in favor of the creation of a new agency for consumerism. He stated that he is engaged now in trying to get the various departments of the Executive Branch to set up beefed-up agencies within their own branches to monitor consumer matters and to be concerned about the interests of the consumer in their particular bailiwicks.

We also discussed the housing bill. The Secretary of HUD, Mrs. Hills, was present and outlined in some detail the provisions of the housing bill. The indication was that there will be a veto of that housing bill.

Senator Scott?

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SENATOR SCOTT: On the matter of crime legislation, the President and the Attorney General briefed us on a coming message which will address itself to matters already under consideration in the Senate, S. 1.

It will recommend revisions of the Federal code. It will involve some very tough recommendations designed to promote domestic tranquility. It recognizes the serious nature of increases in crime.

The program will be a strong message that will involve recommendations for mandatory prison sentences, particularly in the areas of violent crimes and recidivists.

There may be provisions barring parole in certain instances. There will be exceptions for obvious and humanitarian reasons -- the mentally defective, the fringe involvements, those under 18 and so forth.

It is expected there will be recommendations for mandatory provisions having to do with skyjacking and drug dealing, for example.

The problem for improving the offices of prosecutors and of dealing more effectively with recidivists will be taken up. There will be no requests for registration for guns of gun owners and whatever provisions will be in there are yet to be developed, other than that.

There will be some strict standards for sentencing by judges. I, as a former prosecutor, made the point that I think the greatest flaws in the criminal justice system probably are lenient judges, such as one judge in Washington with hundreds of cases who has not yet, I believe, sentenced anyone to prison as a violator, or, if so, in an extraordinarily limited number of cases.

We will try to comprise these suggestions in the present S. 1 in the Senate, and it may well include, as I said, Federal rules on civil procedure. We regard criminal law enforcement in large part as still a problem under the laws of the cities and States, and we believe that the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration Act is working, and is useful, and is helpful.

We also may be asked to consider provisions for compensation of victims of crime, such as 12 States already have.

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Q Could you elaborate on that phrase, "mandatory provisions for skyjacking and drug dealing"? How tough will the mandatory provisions be?

SENATOR SCOTT: We are only told that they will be tough, that they will recommend that judges be required to impose mandatory sentences upon conviction.

Q Isn't there an optional death sentence now for skyjacking, optional? Is that right, sir?

SENATOR SCOTT: I think that is right.

Q It is not mandatory?

SENATOR SCOTT: I think it is optional. It requires a finding.

Q When is this going to Congress?

SENATOR SCOTT: Hopefully this week.

Q Why will the housing bill be vetoed, and how much money is in that?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: It is very hard to cost it out, Helen. There are so many programs that involve commitments in future years. The main reason for the veto is that the provisions do not appear to really be calculated to take care of the problem.

It is not a well-considered bill, and we are also told that the housing starts which we can expect for the balance of the year, according to the best forecasts, are such that again, perhaps the impact of the bill will come just at the time when the starts are picking up anyway and might possibly have a deleterious effect on the inflationary side of the economy.

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Q Will this give help to about 400,000 middle income people?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: There are provisions for subsidies for interest which would; I believe the limitation is such that about 400,000 mortgages could possibly come under that.

There will be a substitute bill prepared, by the way, which we assume will accompany the veto message. The Administration is not unmindful of the need for housing legislation, but it would not care to have this particular bill become law.

SENATOR SCOTT: And the need for foreclosure assistance.

Q Is this bill now on the President's desk?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: It is.

Q When is he expected to veto it?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: He has until the 24th.

Q What is the price tag on that bill?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I don't think it is possible to price it out. There are various contingencies involved. The best estimate is around \$2 billion, I am told.

Q Are those the only three subjects that you mentioned, the only subjects discussed?

SENATOR SCOTT: They are the only three subjects, so questions on any other subjects would be, actually, super arrogation. (Laughter.)

Q Who was the Judge in Washington you were referring to?

SENATOR SCOTT: I don't remember his name. He was referred to by one of the Members of the House, I believe, in the meeting today, and someone said, as I recall it, there were 72 cases without a single jail sentence -- one went to jail out of 72. I don't know what he did to offend that judge.

Q Why is he against registering guns?

SENATOR SCOTT: The President didn't say why he was against it, but I believe that as a Member of Congress he had long held that same position that legitimate owners of guns are not the criminals involved.

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Q Legitimate owners of the kinds of weapons which do not figure generally in crime; it is not like these short guns, particularly in cities.

Q LBJ said he couldn't understand. You know, if you register for fishing licenses and so forth, what is the real objection?

SENATOR SCOTT: I think the real objection is the very great fear which is expressed constantly in Pennsylvania by thousands of people, that it would lead to strong government interference into their rights under the Constitution to bear arms, and would lead under certain kinds of governments to a seizure of citizens' weapons and that it does not serve a purpose of crime prevention.

Most of the people who write me, for example, would favor increasing penalties and new criminal statutes imposing additional penalties for crimes committed with a weapon. They are for law enforcement, but they are very fearful that a strong and authoritarian-minded government someday might seize the citizen's means of defending himself against a form of tyrannist oppression.

Q Do you believe that? Are you against the registration yourself?

SENATOR SCOTT: I think it could happen.

Q Are you against registration?

SENATOR SCOTT: I am against registration of guns for legitimate owners, yes, but I would not be against the so-called Saturday night special sort of thing. I would think if properly drawn we could have such legislation. That is my personal opinion.

Q Senator, the subject of the latest endorsement of the Vice President didn't come up today, I guess?

SENATOR SCOTT: No, the Vice President was there and he and the President seemed quite happy with each other. (Laughter.) I think there is a continuance of a joyful and cherished situation.

Q I notice all that joviality this morning. What is the cause of that?

SENATOR SCOTT: Everybody likes each other, and aside from that, I think we have some reason to feel that we are the only cohesive force in town. (Laughter.) After all, there is a joke, you know -- the difference between the new Democratic Members of the House and the Boy Scout troop in that the Boy Scout troop is led by adults.

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Q You have even lost all your attack. I always expect you to come up here and slash at the Democrats.

SENATOR SCOTT: We love most of them for their mistakes. (Laughter.)

Q This brings up a question, and I am not exactly sure how to word it, but you say you didn't talk about anything but these three subjects?

SENATOR SCOTT: That is right.

Q The country is facing this energy crisis, for months now, all year. There have been weekly trips down to the White House by the Republicans and by the bipartisan leadership. They come out and say that things are looking good, we are on the same track, we are going to get this thing worked out.

Here we are. Not a thing is worked out in energy. Are you ever going to get anything done on the Hill?

SENATOR SCOTT: My dear interlocutory friend, I would point out that practically every meeting we have held has been on energy. There are times when you do have to veer and take other subjects up. All our other meetings seem to have been on energy or foreign policy. We have not said all is well. We have said the President has a program for energy.

I have said several times now that Congress has not produced enough energy to light a five-watt bulb. It is true. I know in the Senate they are desperately searching for an energy bill, any energy bill to put on the calendar next week. Almost anything as an excuse will do, but no energy legislation is being enacted for one reason -- that is the Congress has not got the guts to demand sacrifices from the American people.

You will not conserve energy. You will not find alternative sources of energy without being prepared for sacrifices, and I am prepared to vote for them.

Q What will be the outcome of this if they are not prepared? They are in control.

SENATOR SCOTT: I think the public has to summon its patience, if not its tolerance, and realize that behind the green curtain they brought this disaster upon themselves. They elected an uncontrollable landslide of ebullient but ineffective would-be legislators who have fallen flat on their faces, collectively, and in many cases individually. The thump has been heard throughout Washington.

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Q Congressman, what is the state of the aid to Turkey situation in the House now?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: Actually, there appears to be no action in the House at all on the subject. There have been various meetings. We could discuss that, too, because we have many times. But thus far there is no sign of any movement. The majority seems to just be content to rock along on this as they appear to be rocking along on a lot of other subjects that are of importance to the country.

Q Was this recent announcement by Turkey this morning -- do you think that will make any difference on Capitol Hill?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I can't really be sure. I don't know what will impress these people. I have not been able to find the formula yet.

SENATOR SCOTT: They better take that announcement from Turkey very seriously because action is imminent.

Q Gentlemen, the President is giving a speech, even as we speak now, on the economy. He is saying that the recession is at an end. The indicators indicate this?

SENATOR SCOTT: It is pretty much indicators, right.

Q What are you getting from back home? Do you think the recession is over? Do you think the people really believe the recession is over?

SENATOR SCOTT: I would say my mail shows an increasing number of people feel we are bottoming out. They are thinking in terms of the future and, hopefully, of a better future. The stressful note is lessening in the mail that I am getting and the three-month indicators are working.

I told the leaders of Japanese industry last October -- and I met with almost all of the heads of Ibotsu -- I thought we would start coming out of the recession in June or July in the following year -- that is now -- and the people would recognize that about September. I still think that estimate is on target.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: There seems to be a great resurgence of consumer confidence, at least in the mail I get. I don't know whether it has made itself manifest in the retail sales figures, but my feeling as to the reaction of my people in my own district is that they do feel that the recession has bottomed out.

THE PRESS: Thank you, gentlemen.

END (AT 10:05 A.M. EDT)