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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 7:14 P.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 27, 1974

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: I will read you a statement.

Mrs. Betty Ford was examined at Bethesda Naval Hospital on Thursday morning for a regular medical check-up. During the process of that examination, a small nodule was detected in her right breast. After further medical consultation, it was recommended that the nodule be surgically removed and a biopsy be performed to determine whether it was benign or malignant.

Mrs. Ford has entered Bethesda Naval Hospital for preparation for the surgery which will be performed Saturday. Mrs. Ford entered the hospital at 5:55 p.m. She was accompanied by Mrs. Nancy Howe, Special Assistant to Mrs. Ford.

Dr. William Lukash informed the President yesterday afternoon. Later yesterday, the President and Mrs. Ford decided that Mrs. Ford would enter the hospital tonight and that surgery would be performed tomorrow.

The purpose of the surgery is to determine, through a biopsy, whether the nodule is benign or malignant. Should it prove to be malignant, surgery would be performed to remove the right breast.

Surgery will be performed by Navy Captain William Fouty, Chief of Surgery at Bethesda. He will be assisted by J. Richard Thistlethwaite, civilian consultant to Bethesda Naval Hospital and Professor of Surgery at the George Washington University Medical School. Dr. Lukash will be in attendance. Mrs. Ford was in good spirits when she entered the hospital.

Further announcements regarding Mrs. Ford's condition will probably be made sometime tomorrow afternoon.

Q Will the President go out there tonight?

MR. NESSEN: The President's plans are to have dinner with Susan and we will keep you informed after that.

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Q Do you have a time for surgery, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime tomorrow.

Q Morning or afternoon, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know.

We will give you 15 minutes to file and then we will have some answers for you.

(AT 7:17 P.M. EDT)

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MR. NESSEN: Let me say the President will go to the hospital this evening, and he will be leaving shortly. The pool for traveling to the hospital will be the AP, UPI, AP photographer, UPI photographer, NBC and Maggie Hunter.

Now, I will take your questions right up until about five minutes before he leaves.

Q Is the President going to spend the night at the hospital?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. I don't think so.

Q What time is she going to be operated on tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know.

Q Are you going to brief out there tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a briefing out there tomorrow. Bill Roberts is running the press set-up out there.

Q Where will it be there?

MR. NESSEN: There is an auditorium out there.

Q What time, do you know, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I have to guide you into thinking that we won't have a briefing until after the operation.

Q When is it scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: There is no scheduled time that I know of.

Q Can you say whether it is in the morning or the afternoon?

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

Q Ron, on the biopsies, in most instances, you can find out almost instantly --

MR. NESSEN: Well, that is what the statement says, Tom.

Q Will we be told as well?

MR. NESSEN: You are going to have a briefing with the doctors and I assume they will tell you what they discovered.

Q Are any other members of the family coming home?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that Mike is coming down tonight.

Q From where?

MR. NESSEN: He lives in Massachusetts, and goes to school there. Steve and Jack will not be coming as far as I know.

Q Will this affect the President's plans to preside at the summit?

MR. NESSEN: The plans, as far as we know, are for him to stick to his schedule.

Q Will he be at the hospital during the operation?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we don't know what time the operation is going to be. As you know, he is scheduled to be over there until about one o'clock.

Q What is the First Lady's age?

MR. NESSEN: The First Lady's age is 56.

Q Has she ever had cancer before?

MR. NESSEN: I just talked to them out there and I am told that she has never had surgery for cancer.

Q Ron, has she ever had any breast condition or breast operation before?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't get into that much detail.

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Q Ron, would the operation for the removal of the breast take place immediately after the operation to determine whether it is cancerous?

MR. NESSEN: That is what the statement says.

Q While she is still on the table?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding of the procedure.

Q Ron, has there been any preliminary diagnosis based on heat and cold or anything like that?

MR. NESSEN: The doctors say that they will not know whether it is benign or malignant until after they have performed the biopsy.

Q No indication at this time, or can't you say?

MR. NESSEN: The doctors say the only way to determine whether it is benign or malignant is to perform the biopsy.

Q Ron, was there any evidence that she experienced any pain or discomfort or notice any symptoms like that?

MR. NESSEN: I understand she had no symptoms at all and did not know anything about the nodule until her examination yesterday.

Q Who was the examining doctor? Was it Lukash?

MR. NESSEN: The examination was performed by the gynecological department of Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Q How did Mrs. Ford spend the day today?

MR. NESSEN: Mrs. Ford stuck to her schedule today. She went to the tree planting at the Johnson Grove. She had a meeting with Mrs. Johnson at 4 o'clock, and dropped by the Salvation Army luncheon.

Q She invited Mrs. Johnson, apparently, to the tree planting, didn't she?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q She was very gay at the tree planting.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, she was, and she was all day and she was in good spirits when she entered the hospital.

Q Ron, did she know this all day?

MR. NESSEN: She was told, as I said in the statement, yesterday.

Q What did she and Mrs. Johnson do today, just sit and talk, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any report on their meeting. I wasn't there. There is Helen.

Q They had tea upstairs in the Oval Room and they went to the third floor and the second floor and they left after about an hour and twenty minutes.

Q Was Mrs. Johnson informed that Mrs. Ford would be going into the hospital?

Q Not to my knowledge.

Q The statement, Ron, says that further announcements regarding Mrs. Ford's condition will probably be made sometime Saturday afternoon.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can we therefore divine that the operation is going to be sometime around mid-day?

MR. NESSEN: I simply don't know the time of the operation, but I think you should look for announcements and briefings, and so forth, in the afternoon.

Q Ron, on another subject, does he have an appointment tomorrow with Mr. Healy, of Great Britain?

MR. NESSEN: The schedule is going to be posted shortly, Sara.

Q How do they know they will have to remove the whole breast?

MR. NESSEN: That is the procedure, as I understand it, from Dr. Lukash. In case it is malignant, that is the procedure you follow.

Q As far as you know, Mike is the only one of the children that is coming down?

MR. NESSEN: Susan is already here, as you know.

Q Did the doctors say it was necessary to do this right away?

MR. NESSEN: The statement says that Dr. Lukash talked to the President yesterday and that Mrs. Ford and the President decided that she should enter the hospital tonight and that the surgery would be performed tomorrow.

Q Ron, do you have any idea how long this kind of surgery -- the initial part of the surgery -- would last?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that. I think you are going to get a full medical briefing tomorrow where you can bring up some of the more detailed medical questions.

Q Ron, are we talking about something that could happen now?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't even guess at that. I don't know.

Q Has Mrs. Ford been in good health prior to this discovery?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know.

Q Does she undergo regular physical examinations?

MR. NESSEN: Her last gynecological check-up was six months ago. That is the regular schedule for women, and at that time, all reports were normal.

Q Have you talked to her about this?

MR. NESSEN: No, I have not.

Q She didn't discover it herself? It was discovered by the doctor?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q What is the gynecologist's name?

MR. NESSEN: That did the examination? It was the department out there. I think you will get a lot of names of people tomorrow.

Bob Pierpoint has pointed out to me that the statement is not as clear as I thought it was on the timing of the operation to remove the breast in case it is malignant. The plan, according to Dr. Lukash, would be to perform that surgery immediately after the results of the biopsy are known, if it is malignant.

Q And would that be a matter of minutes, or a few hours, or a few days?

MR. NESSEN: Immediately after, Bob, or --

Q In other words, she would stay in the operating room until --

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to get into that detail, but it would be performed tomorrow.

Q Ron, is Susan going out with him tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I believe so.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 7:37 P.M. EDT)