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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:24 P.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 30, 1974

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President began his working day in the Oval Office by meeting with members of his staff, who included General Scowcroft, Bob Hartmann, Don Rumsfeld and myself. As Don told you, the President stopped in at the senior staff meeting this morning to welcome him.

The President, as you know, then went to the Sheraton Park Hotel to welcome those attending the opening session of the 1974 meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank group. After that, he returned to the White House.

The President has indicated that Mrs. Ford's doctors would like her to rest during the day today and so the President plans to go to the hospital after dinner this evening. We will have the same travel pool all day today, so the ones who went to the Sheraton Park will go to the hospital tonight. You will get plenty of notice, and that pool has been posted.

Q Can you give us a closer time rather than after dinner?

MR. NESSEN: I can't.

Q You can go back and ask him what time he is going to eat.

MR. NESSEN: You will get ample notice before he goes.

The schedule that we posted for this afternoon originally has had a couple of slight changes.

At 2 o'clock, the President will meet with Russell Peterson, the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality. As you know, the President has been having a series of meetings to get acquainted with the heads of departments and agencies in the Executive Branch, and that is part of it, and he plans to have others. In fact, he has one later in the afternoon, which I will come to.

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There was a 2:30 meeting on the schedule with Congressmen Holifield and Frank Horton, and that has been called off. There was a conflict of schedules there.

At 3 o'clock, the President will have his picture taken with a group of Congressional candidates. These are candidates who are not now in office but are running for office. We will try to get a list up to you so you can figure out who was there. This was originally scheduled for 4 o'clock.

At around 4:30, the President is going to meet with Marshall T. Mays, President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and that is another one of these get acquainted meetings with the heads of agencies.

About 4:45, the President will meet with Roy Ash, Bill Timmons and Ken Cole. The purpose of that is to discuss legislative matters, including the matter of holding down the budget.

For the schedule for tomorrow and the rest of the week, we really can't give you anything at the moment. The President has asked Governor Rockefeller to take his place at the scheduled speeches in Provo, Utah, and in San Francisco.

A note for yourselves. The President is not going and, therefore, there will be no press plane from here.

Governor Rockefeller has an office here, and Hugh Morrow is his Press Secretary, and we have the numbers here, and so you can get directly in touch with him.

Q Ron, tomorrow, is there a big transit meeting with Mayor Beame?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen the schedule yet. I know there was a discussion of that. Don told you there was a discussion in the senior staff meeting of some possible changes in the President's schedule, and there has been no decision made on that one. I think I would have to say that schedule hasn't been posted yet for tomorrow.

Q A procedural question. A pathological study which was due out at Bethesda, will it be available to us here simultaneously?

MR. NESSEN: That is a reproduction problem, and I am not sure about getting it here simultaneously, but we will certainly try.

Q There is a medical bulletin simultaneously.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but those have been dictated over the phone, and this may be longer than that.

Q Will you try for us?

MR. NESSEN: We certainly will.

Q Does the President know what is in it?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't talked to him about that, no.

Just a little follow to the economic summit meeting. The President was very pleased with the conference, and he appreciated the recommendations and ideas and thoughts he got from all of the people who participated.

The President said himself there is a great deal of work to be done now that the meeting is over and, as you know, he promised that he would have specific recommendations by early next week. I want to point out that --

Q Will you take questions on that?

MR. NESSEN: Would you like me to finish this discussion of it and then we can do that.

Every recommendation made during the pre-summit conferences and all of the recommendations that came up at the final two-day meeting were recorded, indexed, catalogued and cross referenced by subject and by the meeting, so that they can be gotten ahold of and looked at carefully.

After the meeting closed on Saturday, an expanded group of the executive committee of the new Economic Policy Board met for several hours in a planning session, and they reviewed each of the recommendations.

A part of the meeting was spent organizing their own operation and the rest of it on reviewing the recommendations. That meeting lasted for three and one-half hours on Saturday, beginning at 3 o'clock. They met again on Sunday at 3:30 for three hours, and they met this morning at 8:30 for an hour and a half.

I am doing this in somewhat backwards order. I wanted to tell you about the meetings, and then I am going to come to you on how this new organization is going to work, if you can wait just a moment.

Specific assignments were made whereby each of the recommendations are to be analyzed and reviewed by one of the President's economic advisers, and the agency involved in that particular recommendation. The people who are assigned to follow down these recommendations are then going to prepare option papers for specific program recommendations.

These recommendations are going to be reviewed by the President and by the executive committee of the Economic Policy Board, and the President will have some specific recommendations to announce early next week.

The President is going to be spending a good deal of his time this week, and especially towards the end of the week, concentrating on these decisions and on these issues.

We have in the Press Office a small number of transcripts of the Friday and Saturday meeting, and if you could limit yourselves to one copy for each organization and then put in requests for additional copies at the Government Printing Office.

Now, as far as the organization goes, as you know, the President announced that there would be a new Economic Policy Board and this board will oversee the formulation, coordination and implementation of all economic policy.

Treasury Secretary Simon is the chairman of that board. Secretary Simon will be the principal spokesman for the Executive Branch on matters of economic policy. This new board will be the focal point for economic policy decision-making, both domestic and international decisions.

Secretary Simon will also be chairman of the executive committee of this board, the committee which met three times so far since the summit meeting, and the executive committee will meet every day.

The members of that executive committee are Mr. Greenspan; Mr. William Eberle, who is the Executive Director of the Council on International Economic Policy; a senior member of the Office of Management and Budget, Roy Ash has attended the three meetings held so far; Dr. Burns will attend the executive committee meetings, and also the board meetings when appropriate; Secretary Simon, of course, and the Executive Director of the committee is Bill Seidman. The committee will meet every day in the Roosevelt Room.

Q For how long, until the speech or what?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have to see on that. I don't know the answer to that question, Jim.

Q Is that the President's order that they meet every day?

MR. NESSEN: I think we are going to have for you shortly, Helen -- by shortly, I don't necessarily mean today, but soon -- the actual language of the Executive Order, setting up these changes and you will be able to see how the President has directed that this be carried out.

Q Will we be able to see Simon out from time to time out here, according to Rumsfeld's promise?

MR. NESSEN: Not only his promise, but my promise. Yes, you will.

Q What is the format of the announcement early next week of the President's economic package?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have anything to give you yet on the manner in which it will be presented.

Q Ron, are you telling us that Mr. Simon now takes over the Ken Rush role?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that we need to compare it with the past organization. This is the way it is going to be from now on, and I think you can see for yourself how it is organized.

Q Ron, you have made reference and, of course, the President did too to the fact that he is going to make his speech or make his announcement or something within the next ten days. You have referred to it as sometime next week.

As you also recall, of course, Mr. Seidman told a group of reporters some time ago that probably there will be no major proposals or not very many, at least, until the first of the year. What is the reason for the change?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen those remarks of Bill Seidman that you referred to, so I don't want to say that there has been a change. But I think you can tell from the President's speech the other day that he considers this a very important problem, and he believes that specific proposals need to be made as early as possible and as soon as he can have the committee and the board go through them and presented to him for his decisions he is going to make decisions.

Q Let us see if we can approach it from a different direction. If you did not see the Seidman interview. There have been several reports, published reports, that some of the President's advisers now consider the economic situation somewhat more urgent and alarming than they did a short time ago. Are these reports correct, and does this account for the fact that the President has decided to make his proposals next week?

MR. NESSEN: I don't need to really speak for the economic advisers and how they view the economic situation, because they have said all of that publicly. I gave you some of Bill Seidman's and Al Greenspan's remarks here the other day. I am just not aware that there has been any change in the time-table.

The idea always was, since I have been here anyhow, to have some specific economic proposals to make as soon as possible.

Q The one specific part of my question was, leaving aside the question of whether there has or hasn't been a change in the time-table, has there been a change in the way or in the assessment of the President's economic advisers about the economy?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, Jim, not that I am aware of.

Q Legislation would probably be a part of some of these proposals, supposedly, and there is only a couple of weeks left in this Congress unless they come back after the elections. Has the President changed his position on that or does he still believe that a lame duck session is not good?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you the other day, the President has been advised that Congress seems to be pointing toward a lame duck session and I don't see why the question of whether he approves or disapproves comes up. The Congress is organizing its business the way it feels it needs to.

Le me finish, if I may --

Q The thing is, if he has things to go to Congress, he would want a session, wouldn't he?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will see in whatever form these specific proposals are made, the President will indicate which ones he feels need to be acted on most quickly and I think that will all be in the message for you, Helen. You will see his feelings about which need to be acted on immediately and how quickly he feels they are needed.

Q Ron, could you give us the reasons for the change of heart over the proposed 10 to 15 to 20 cent a gallon gas excise tax which was from that very podium written off by Mr. Jerry terHorst several weeks ago, and now they are written on as a possibility again. It was under Presidential authorization totally scrapped as of possibly two or three weeks ago.

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, Jerry, what Jerry terHorst reported was that the President is opposed to a special tax on gasoline. The special tax on gasoline is one of the many, many ideas that are right now being considered by his economic advisers.

It has not come to him for a decision. I see nothing that supercedes what Jerry terHorst told you before. The President said the other day, I think, at the closing of the economic summit meeting that he does have an open mind on how to fight inflation and I don't think I can carry it any further than that.

There have been a series of stories in the papers about various proposals which are being studied and that is one of many ideas that his economic advisers have.

Q Ron, can I follow that up? If the President has an open mind, then evidently he is prepared to change his mind on this. However, if Mr. terHorst's comments stand, then he is prepared to remain in opposition to it. Which of those? They can't be both, Ron, it has got to be one or the other.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see any conflict there, Jerry. He is, at the moment, opposed to any special tax on gasoline and it is one of the ideas being considered.

Q He could change his mind.

MR. NESSEN: I won't go beyond what he said the other day, which is that he has an open mind on ways to fight inflation.

Q Couldn't you say the same thing for wage and price controls?

MR. NESSEN: He has spoken pretty firmly on that, and I think we will have to leave it with his firm statement.

Q Would you say he has a closed mind on wage and price controls? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The way he put it was I think he said he is opposed to wage and price controls, period. As far as I know, he has not changed.

Q What about the names of those senior advisers?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to get on with it, if we could. I can give them to you here. I have told you about how the committee is going to operate.

Mr. Seidman has been announced by the President to be Assistant to the President for Economic Affairs. He has a lot of duties and among others, he will serve as a member and Executive Director of the Economic Policy Board and also of the Executive Committee. He is going to be responsible for coordinating the implementation of economic policy and providing liaison with the Presidential staff and with other Governmental activities.

Secretary Simon and Mr. Seidman will have responsibilities for ensuring that there is an adequate coordination among existing and proposed committees relating to economic policy.

In connection with getting this coordination, Secretary Simon will serve as Chairman and Mr. Seidman as Deputy Chairman of the Council on Wage and Price Stability, the Council on International Economic Policy, the National Advisory Council on International Economic Policy. Those are two separate organizations.

Q Are we going to get a hand-out on this?

MR. NESSEN: Maybe that would be the easiest way to do it. Let me go through it quickly and we will get it down in writing for you.

This was prepared for Saturday and we should have it here. I know it was out on Saturday and I thought I would go through it with you so you would understand it, but you should have the piece of paper. We will see if we can get some copies or run some more off so you will have it all down in writing. That is probably the easiest way. Let's do it now.

The National Advisory Council on International Economic Policy, the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Policy and the President's Committee on East-West Trade Policy.

I have told you that Secretary Simon will be the Chairman of this Economic Policy Board. We are clear now on the difference between the board and the committee.

Now, you want to know the members of the board. Simon is the Chairman, as I have told you.

Q I don't think that we have that one.

MR. NESSEN: Now, as you know, he named Albert Rees as the Executive Director of the Council on Wage and Price Stability and he announced that Sylvia Porter was going to help with the consumer or public aspect of this. Paul McCracken is a consultant who is helping to put together the various proposals. He is working with Bill Seidman.

Q Sylvia Porter is an adviser, is she not, for the League? Isn't she supposed to be gathering together all the suggestions from the public?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. That is part of it.

Q Will she be paid on a consulting basis for her work?

MR. NESSEN: I hoped to be able to have that for you today and we got fairly rushed just before we came out here. I didn't get it but I will get what Sylvia Porter's exact job is.

The members who attended these three economic committee meetings which have been held so far include Bill Seidman, Alan Greenspan, Roy Ash, Paul McCracken, Secretary Lynn, Bill Baroody, Bill Eberle, a State Department representative and a Treasury Department representative.

Q How about Simon?

MR. NESSEN: Simon, obviously, will be attending, but he was busy this weekend preparing for the IMF meeting at the hotel.

I will try to take your questions.

Q Can you go back to that gas tax for just a minute? Are you saying that the President's position is still such that he is personally opposed to it and that nothing has changed since the time Jerry terHorst told us that he was opposed to it and would not favor any move to institute it?

MR. NESSEN: As I remember what Jerry said, it was that the President did not favor a 10-cent a gallon tax on gasoline.

Q As I recall his statement, he said he was flatly opposed.

Q He left the unmistakable impression that that proposal had been scrapped. Are you qualifying that?

MR. NESSEN: I am not modifying that. The President did not at that time, and I have no reason to believe that he has changed in favor of a gasoline tax. It is an idea that is under study and the President has said he has an open mind. I don't see any conflict in that.

Q He said he was flatly opposed.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that he said he didn't favor it.

Q When you say he has an open mind to it, are you saying that?

MR. NESSEN: I am not saying he has an open mind to it. He said he had an open mind about ideas on how to fight inflation.

Q Does that include a gas tax?

MR. NESSEN: I suppose it includes having an open mind on a lot of things.

Q Well, can't you be a little bit more precise?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot.

Q Ron, is there another option under consideration of a tax on heavy users of other fuels, natural gas and possibly others?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that, Frank. I can check it for you if you would like.

Q What is under consideration, a 10-cents a gallon tax or 20 cents a gallon, or both, or what, in the gasoline field?

MR. NESSEN: I think it just hasn't reached the point where they have focused in on any specific numbers at all. It is one of a lot of ideas. You attended some of the meetings and you know there were many ideas that came out of them.

Q I didn't hear that one too often in terms of 10 cents a gallon. Where did that idea come from?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't poll them that closely.

Q Ron, does the President's opposition to policy take precedence over his open-mindedness? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can answer that in any way that is helpful to you.

Q Does the policy rule out its adoption?

MR. NESSEN: We are talking about opposition and as I recall Jerry's remarks, it was that he didn't favor that.

Q Can you put it this way? Would this proposal, if the President were more favorably disposed to it, could it possibly be included in the package that he proposed next week?

MR. NESSEN: Will it be included?

Q Could it be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that question. All I know is it is one of many ideas under study.

Q Ron, can I rephrase the question? Can you rule out the possibility that that proposal in some form might wind up in the economic package proposed by the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is my job to rule out anything at this stage, Jerry.

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Q Are you saying you don't know how he feels about it now? We have gone through this thing a half an hour, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I know that.

Q Can you find out and go in and ask him how he feels point blank about the gas tax?

MR. NESSEN: I would be happy to, Bob.

Q Ron, can you give us the names of the people --

MR. NESSEN: I do want to emphasize before we leave the subject, if we are going to leave it, that it is not a matter that has come to his desk for a decision.

Q Can you give us the names of people that can see the President without going through Rumsfeld?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that is the way you asked the question to Don. What Don said was could I provide you with a list of senior advisers, I think.

Q This morning when I asked about whether they don't have to clear their appointments with Don Rumsfeld --

MR. NESSEN: I thought what he asked me to get you was to have a list of senior advisers.

Q He answered Jim Deakin by saying he would give you a list of people at the senior advisers' meeting so that we would know.

MR. NESSEN: The people who normally attend the meeting and I am going to put it on that basis and not for the moment, at least until I have checked further, say that all of these people can see the President whenever they want. I am going to give you the names of people who normally attend the senior staff meeting: Don Rumsfeld, of course, presides; Anne Armstrong; Dean Burch; Jack Marsh, and Ken Rush has been attending, but I don't know what his status is --

Q Who will take his place, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. -- Roy Ash; Bill Buchen; Ken Cole, Bill Timmons; myself, Alan Greenspan, and Scowcroft is there, too. I have only been here a couple of days or a week, and I haven't seen Hartmann in the meetings.

Q Rumsfeld named Hartmann as being in the meeting this morning.

MR. NESSEN: Hartmann was there this morning, that is right. Last week I only attended a couple of them, but I don't want you to think he is not a senior adviser, because you know he is. He is a senior adviser.

Q What about Bill Seidman?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Did everyone get that, that Bill Seidman is in there, too?

Q It would appear that not everyone on that list could just call up directly and go in and see the President whenever the President personally decided. Are there certain people that can and certain people that can't on that list?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to find out for you.

Q Let us put it this way: You have named 13 people here.

MR. NESSEN: In answer to the question of who attends the senior staff meetings.

Q Mr. Rumsfeld talked about the need for orderly procedure. Can you conceive yourself that orderly procedure could be achieved if each of these 13 people were permitted to --

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment, please. Let me add a couple of other names, because not everybody attends every day because obviously people have other commitments some mornings, but these are the people who, if there were a full attendance there, would be there, and that includes Dr. Kissinger and Bill Simon. If I don't attend, for instance, my deputy attends and theirs do, too.

Q To go back to my question, we now have 15 people on a list, and Rumsfeld spoke this morning of the need for orderly procedure, to permit the President to make the best use of his time. Can you conceive that orderly procedure could ever be achieved if each of these 15 could go in to the President's office whenever they wanted to without some kind of clearinghouse or clearing it with somebody, specifically Rumsfeld, some kind of scheduling?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't think that that is the kind of question I can answer because it has to do with Don's duties as coordinator, and he was out here where he was open to take questions.

Q He was cut off and he left us with, I think, two rather conflicting things. He said on the one hand that he was not going to function in effect as any kind of traffic cop, that there were people that could see the President without going through him, and at another point he said the President decides who he sees and he would be working with the President on that.

Now, these tend to sort of conflict. I am trying to find out to what degree there is going to be some Rumsfeld coordination here as deciding who sees the President and who can just go in without any kind of advance notice.

MR. NESSEN: I think that is really the thing you should have asked Don.

Q As I remember the transcript, we asked him that, and he said the people who are in that senior staff meeting can go in and see him without appointment.

MR. NESSEN: If you would like me to clarify the matter of who can go in and who cannot, I think that I should get that from him because I think that I should get it from him.

Q Ron, last week you gave us a fill on a telephone conversation between President Ford and former President Nixon, and in the course of that you left out a rather important point; namely, that Mr. Nixon volunteered to return the pardon. Can you tell us if that was a deliberate oversight on your part or did you not know about that portion of the conversation when you briefed us?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't consider it an oversight. As I told you last week, when I enumerated the phone conversations there have been in answer to your questions, I said there had been a phone conversation on the 17th of September, the one time that the former President called here, and I said at that time that at the beginning of the conversation there was a passing reference to reaction to the pardon and what I had in mind was what some of you have no doubt seen printed.

Q But you didn't tell us that.

Q You said there was a passing reference to public reaction to the pardon, I think is what you said.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You didn't tell us that Mr. Nixon in his passing reference to the reaction of his pardon offered to return the pardon?

MR. NESSEN: Well, let me see if I can clear up the matter of offering to return the pardon. I think to understand the conversation and the reason I didn't go into the specifics of it was because I told you I didn't feel I should paraphrase or quote conversations between the President and former President. But let me see if I can't cast some light on the way this was said.

It was indeed a passing reference. The conversation opened with the usual pleasantries, and in the course of that the former President said--and none of these things are exact quotations, but more or less general paraphrases of how the conversation went--I am sorry for the trouble this has caused you, and I will send the pardon back, if that will help. The President replied, no, it is not necessary, and they went on with their conversation.

What I think you really ought to understand, to understand this conversation, was that it was said in an offhand way, it was interpreted as being a sort of polite gesture and certainly not considered to be any sort of formal legal offer to return the pardon.

Q Can we hear the tape of the conversation?

MR. NESSEN: There was no tape of the conversation. The President did not and does not consider it to be a serious offer to return the pardon. It was done in the course of the initial polite exchange at the beginning and the President interpreted it that way, and his reply to it was in the sense of a polite saying, "No, that is all right," and going on with the conversation. I think it would be a bad mistake --

Q Did he also say it will all blow over?

MR. NESSEN: I saw that printed in Hugh's column, and as far as what I have been told was in the conversation, I don't remember that was in the phone conversation. I think it is important to understand the tone and the circumstances of this exchange and not to believe that it was a serious offer to return the pardon.

I say that because that is what the President believes it was, a passing reference, which is the way I originally described it.

Q Ron, did you know at the time that you gave us the fill, did you know specifically that there had been this, as you call it, passing reference to the offer to return the pardon if it will help?

MR. NESSEN: I did.

Q You did not tell us about that.

MR. NESSEN: I told you at the time that I didn't feel I ought to paraphrase or quote from the conversation, but the President considered it to be a passing reference to reaction and, therefore, I considered it to be a passing reference to reaction and that is exactly what I told you it was.

Q Why didn't you take it seriously?

MR. NESSEN: Because, Helen, as I have said just now, because of where it took place in the conversation, and the way it was offered.

Q Ron, do you think the former President, Mr. Nixon, was sincere when he apologized for the trouble he was causing him or was that an offhand remark, too?

MR. NESSEN: Well, you know, you are going to have to ask the former President what he meant.

Q I don't understand. As a newsman, you would have recognized that that was significant in any of the past years when you were reporting, you would have recognized that that was interesting and something more than just a passing reference. I don't understand.

MR. NESSEN: It was considered by the President to be a passing reference, and that is --

Q Did he tell you not to specifically mention it or don't get specific on it?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly did not.

Q You just called it a passing reference.

Q Ron, you had said when you took over this job you would never intentionally mislead the press. Are you saying to us now that you are defending the proposition that that particular part of the conversation was not relevant and was not germane and was not interesting and was not news and, therefore, you didn't mislead us? Are you defending --

MR. NESSEN: I certainly am defending the fact I have never misled you about anything since I have been on this job.

Q As I am sure you would agree, misleading includes sins of omission, leaving things out. Can you defend, really, the omission of that fact from your account of the conversation?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think I explained to you the day that I told you about the phone conversation that there had been a passing reference to the reaction to the pardon, which is what this is considered to be. I also told you at the same time that I didn't feel it was proper for me to quote directly or even paraphrase very closely the conversations between the President and the former President, and I don't see a conflict there.

Q Now it has come out and you are willing to do it. Consistency would require you to say that you still weren't going to quote it.

MR. NESSEN: It is out and the reason I am discussing it at a little greater length today is in an effort to explain to you the manner in which the President considers the conversation.

Q Do you think it has been blown out of context?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard that at all.

Q Did he offer to admit any guilt as a part of that, which might clear the air?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear that, Helen.

Q Wouldn't it have been better in the first place just to have told us what the passing reference was rather than explaining it in another fashion?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Mort, if it had been something that was considered a serious offer to return the pardon, I probably would have raised the questions that you do here about as a newsman, wouldn't I consider that newsworthy and so forth. But considering how the President considered it, I thought that I gave you an accurate general report on what was in the conversation.

Q Ron, did they discuss on this phone conversation the fact that the Congress has slashed the \$850,000 proposals and has the President had any comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, they did not discuss that particular aspect.

Q If I could follow up on that, and that is this --

MR. NESSEN: Phil wants to clean up something here.

Q Ron, was there anything else in that conversation that some of us might consider newsworthy that you haven't told us about?

MR. NESSEN: That I might not have recognized as being newsworthy

Q Something that you might now be able to tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I have gone through with you and did last week and I am not just going through it for the first time today, but I did go through it with you last week, and I have heard the President describe the phone conversation several times since then, and as far as I can determine, there was nothing else other than what I told you, the passing reference to the reaction, the conversation was less than ten minutes, there was some talk about how were the SALT talks going and some praise for Dr. Kissinger.

Q Do you have any idea where the leak came from, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: What leak?

Q The leak to Time Magazine?

MR. NESSEN: Well, you know, I don't think that I ought to be in the business of disclosing Hugh Sidey's sources, do you?

Q Ron, would Mr. Ford have accepted that had it been, he thought, a serious offer? Would he accept today if the former President called and said, "I am going to send it back"?

MR. NESSEN: That is a very hypothetical question, Phil. You have heard the President say on many occasions that he thinks he did the right thing. There is no offer that we know of to return the pardon.

Q Public reaction?

MR. NESSEN: He talked at his last news conference about that, didn't he? Did he say it was stronger than he thought it would be, that he expected reaction, but that it was stronger than he thought?

Q If you had known you were going to be reading that in Time Magazine, would you have leveled with us last week?

MR. NESSEN: I think I leveled with you last week.

Q Ron, can you tell us how Mrs. Ford's health will affect the President's schedule in the future and, you know, if he is spacing out time to go to the hospital twice a day and what else is being canceled and what is his view now of his future?

MR. NESSEN: Didn't some people ask him that directly last night, and he gave a direct answer, I think.

Q I thought he might have had more time to think.

MR. NESSEN: I talked to him about it this morning, and his answer is exactly as he gave it to you last night.

Q What did he mean, I have not thought beyond next week? There are a lot of things on his mind?

MR. NESSEN: It meant he hadn't thought beyond next week. That is what he meant.

Q Everything is on next week?

MR. NESSEN: Didn't we tell you this morning that as far as specific things, we really can't give you the precise schedule beyond what it is, that aside from canceling the Utah and California trips, that at the moment we are proceeding with the plans for the other scheduled appearances that have been announced. I am telling you now that we are proceeding with the scheduled appearances as planned.

Q Ron, are you telling these people -- understand of course Mrs. Ford's condition could change all of this, and to be prepared in case there is a no show?

MR. NESSEN: I don't work in the scheduling office, so I don't know what is being told, but I do know at the moment we --

Q From next week on, all the travel that has been set is on?

MR. NESSEN: We are proceeding with the plans for scheduled appearances.

Q One more on the gas tax, if I might. You said he is at the moment opposed to any special tax on gasoline. Does it follow, then, that when he is presented convincing advice by his political and economic advisers, that he might not change his mind in the future.

MR. NESSEN: You have to write your own interpretation. You know I have said all I think I can really say on this today, and I don't see how I can go beyond it.

Q Ron, is the President going to the Hirshorn Museum opening tomorrow night?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is up in the air. We canceled that on Saturday, I think, or Friday.

MORE

Q Ron, I have a several-part question here regarding Senators Javits and Pell. Are they representing the White House in their visit to Cuba, number one. Did they talk the President before they went and do they plan on talking with him when they return?

MR. NESSEN: Senators Pell and Javits are not in Cuba on behalf of the Executive Branch of the United States. (Laughter)

Q Was there some question about that punctuation?

MR. NESSEN: Phil had several other parts to his multi-part question.

Q The next part is, did they talk to the President before they left?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that. I will have to check.

Q And is he asking them to come to the White House for a debriefing?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, either, but I will check .

Q About the pardon itself, the House Judiciary Subcommittee opened hearings last week which dealt partly with a resolution of inquiry on the pardon and some of the Members were upset at the response they got for preliminary information from the White House. This committee is meeting again tomorrow and they have asked for further information from the White House about the decision-making process on the pardon and also, they have asked for Phil Buchen to testify. Is the information forthcoming and will Mr. Buchen testify?

MR. NESSEN: The letter has been received here. It was received last Thursday and there has been no decision made on whether or not Mr. Buchen or anyone else on the White House staff will appear to testify.

Q Why not? You have delayed it twice now.

Q Why has no decision been made?

MR. NESSEN: Pardon?

Q His appearance would be for tomorrow morning and why has no decision been made so far, and is the executive privilege involved in the delay?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I really can't go much beyond the fact that the decision has not been made. It was a Presidential decision, he is the one responsible for it. He thinks, as he has told everybody publicly, that it was the right course and that he did it because of his conscience and his convictions.

Q Would you answer the second part of the question, which was, is executive privilege part of the reason for the delay and does it figure in the President's answers that he has made so far?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to have to say that no decision has been made.

Q Ron, I wonder, now that you have been here for a week --

MR. NESSEN: A year, you mean, isn't it? It seems like a year.

Q Then all the better. Can you define the word "soon" as applied to the departure, and also, does this also apply to Buchanan and Clawson? We see things in the Washington Star-News that indicates these people are still on the payroll. What are they doing? The President appeals for economy on the part of the people, and yet, these people are retained. Certainly they are not writing speeches, I hope. What are they doing and when are they going? Can you tell us when? When does McLaughlin go? Is it tomorrow? Is there a farewell ceremony that is open to coverage? (Laughter) Won't you tell us, please?

MR. NESSEN: Do you want to attend?

Q I sure do.

MR. NESSEN: What did Don tell you when you asked him the question? Don Rumsfeld.

Q He said he didn't know. He said he would discuss it with you and the staff as I recall.

MR. NESSEN: You had better wait until we have had the discussion and I can give you an intelligent answer to it.

Q In other words, McLaughlin is not going, as his secretary indicated?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly wouldn't read that into it.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

END

(AT 1:13 P.M. EDT)