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NEWS CONFERENCE

#71

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:50 A.M. EST

NOVEMBER 13, 1974

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President had breakfast this morning for about an hour with Senator Scott. This is another of the meetings the President is holding with leaders before they come back for the lame duck session of Congress.

The primary topic of discussion was the need the President feels to get on quickly with the confirmation of Governor Rockefeller.

The second topic of discussion was the proposed cuts in the budget for 1975 which the President will make.

And third is the legislation which the President will ask the lame duck session to pass.

As you know, the President has already had meetings with Senator Mansfield and Speaker Albert.

After the breakfast, the President came to the Oval Office at 8:35 and had meetings with the following staff members: Don Rumsfeld, Secretary Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, Bob Hartmann, Bill Timmons, and myself.

Q Together?

MR. NESSEN: No, these were separate meetings.

During the day the President is going to hold a series of meetings that I think I mentioned to you at one point before. These are the meetings at which the departments and agencies will have a final opportunity to appeal if they disagree with any of the budget cuts that the President is considering.

At 12:30, the President will receive the first strikes of the new quarter, half dollar and dollar coins, designated for the Bicentennial. The Mint Director, Mary Brooks, and the Bicentennial Administrator, John Warner, will be here for the presentation in the Oval Office.

MORE

#71

There will be an opportunity to take still pictures and film of that. That will be in the Cabinet Room, and because of the size, I think we will make that for sound.

However, at 1:00 in the Cabinet Room, the President and Mrs. Ford will sign WIN pledges. I don't have the full details on that, but that will be at 1:00 in the Cabinet Room. And I think we will go ahead and let sound go in on that one.

There will be a mult available in the Cabinet Room for that.

At 5:00 the President will meet with a group of Coastal State Governors and Secretary Morton to discuss how the Nation can expeditiously and wisely explore and develop the oil and gas potential of the outer continental shelf.

After that meeting, which will probably be about 6:30, Secretary Morton will come out here for any of those who wish to ask him questions about the meeting.

Q When will the meeting start?

MR. NESSEN: The meeting begins at 5:00.

Q What Governors will he see?

MR. NESSEN: The list will be put up. I don't have the list at the moment.

Q Do you expect any of the Governors to come out here?

MR. NESSEN: We could ask some, if you would like them to.

Have we distributed the recissions and deferrals?

Q Is Governor Wallace here?

MR. NESSEN: Governor Wallace is not attending, I understand, the reason for that being that the Southern Governors are having a Southern Growth Policy Board Meeting in Atlanta, so they will not be coming. So those coming will be principally from the New England and Mid-Atlantic, and there will be another meeting soon with the Southern Governors.

Q And Western?

MR. NESSEN: I guess we will have to set up a meeting with the Western Governors, too.

The recissions and deferral package, has that been handed out? The fifth package of recissions and deferrals is coming out today, and you will get it at some point soon.

Tomorrow the President is going to Las Vegas, to Luke Air Force Base, and to Phoenix. There will be a detailed press schedule posted later today. I think we already have given you the main event times.

Here is some good news. Those of you going on the trip are invited to be the guests of the Pulliam Foundation during the afternoon at the Lazy R and G Ranch near Phoenix. There are about three hours, if you recall the schedule, during which the President will be preparing for his appearance before the Sigma Delta Chi, and the plan would be that after you have arrived at the Del Webb Townhouse, there will be about a half hour for filing, and then we would have a bus to take you over to the Lazy R and G Ranch, which is owned by the Phoenix Republican-Gazette.

Gene Pulliam, who is the President and publisher of those papers, and also a founder of Sigma Delta Chi, has invited you, through our advance people in Phoenix. And the activities at the ranch include swimming, tennis, baseball, horseshoes, and probably more attractive, a restaurant and bar. And there will be towels provided -- . (Laughter) I don't think that is for the bar though -- and also a locker room.

Q This is not like some of those ranches in Nevada, is it? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Hasn't that lady gone into public service? Maybe she was always in public service. Oh, she got beat.

Q What about the text on the real estate speech. Do we get that today, the text on Las Vegas?

MR. NESSEN: We hope to have it tonight.

Q Do you know what the subject will be?

MR. NESSEN: The housing industry and the economy in general, but specifically the housing industry.

The ranch is about four miles from Del Webb's Townhouse so what you could do is, since there are going to be three hours, and you are going to leave for the ranch, if you want to go, about a half hour after getting there, and then you should probably leave to come back a half hour before the speech, you can probably count on about two and a half hours of fun and frivolity.

Q What time will that be? Early afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: The speech is at 6:00. Take away three hours would be 3:00. Yes, mid-afternoon, Phoenix time.

Q Will he make a speech and then answer questions?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a short speech at the beginning and then Q and A, and I think we went over yesterday the format for Q and A's. There is a sign-up list for those who want to ask questions. What we would do will be, this afternoon we will draw names out of a hat, or something, to select the people and the order in which the White House people ask their questions.

Q Will the networks cover the Q and A?

MR. NESSEN: We never try to tell the networks what to cover, as you know. I understand that at least one network intends to.

Q Which one is that?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that CBS plans to. We don't get very deeply into that any more.

Q Ron, how long will the questions be allowed?

MR. NESSEN: Well, they are figuring the whole program would last an hour, so if he talks for, say, 15 minutes, 20 minutes, you would end up with something like 40 minutes of questions.

Q Will this talk be off-the-cuff?

MR. NESSEN: No, it will be prepared.

Q Will we get an advance of that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q When will that be available?

MR. NESSEN: Again, either late tonight or on the trip tomorrow.

Q Do you have a subject on that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not say because I think it is something he wants to -- you will see it when you get the text.

Q Will we get a text?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a text, yes.

Q In advance?

MR. NESSEN: In advance, yes.

Some details of the trip to the Far East. I thought that some of you would want to write preview pieces for Sunday before we left. I asked Dr. Kissinger yesterday afternoon whether he would be willing to meet with you. He was. So he will meet with you at a news conference on the record, available, for filming and taping, at 3:00 on Friday in Room 450 of the EOB. That is that auditorium over there. So, you can think about having that information from Dr. Kissinger before you sit down to write your advance.

Q Will that be embargoed?

MR. NESSEN: No, not that I am aware of.

Q You say on the record, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q If we were to broadcast live, would we have to delay it, tape it and delay it?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't even know anyone would want to broadcast live, so I didn't even raise that question. Are you talking about Dr. Kissinger's news conference or the speech?

Q Kissinger news conference.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Normally Dr. Kissinger's news conferences have to be delayed.

MR. NESSEN: Let's check that out after this briefing, okay?

We are going to also be making some material available to you from here before the departure on Sunday. The usual press books will be available on the plane, so you will have a chance to read those on the flight over.

Friday and Saturday we also will try to make available to you as much information as possible. On Friday, for instance, we will try to get you the usual material about what to pack, and you know, what the temperature is likely to be, and the dysentary problems and that kind of thing.

Friday and Saturday we also hope to have things like the official party lists and the schedule for at least the first part of the trip, and so forth.

Now we do have some nitty-gritty details about baggage check-in times and which plane talks off first, and who is going to be on which plane, and show-up times. I really think that this can be most easily posted, and I would like to do it that way, if it is all right.

Q When will you post that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is already announced, so we can put it out right after the briefing. The sign-up list for questions at Sigma Delta Chi, anyone who wants to ask one should have his name on the list immediately after this briefing, because we are going to take the list down and start drawing the names out of the hat.

We will post all this information on the time to have your baggage where.

Q What time is the Q and A before Sigma Delta Chi?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the whole appearance begins at 6:00 Phoenix time, which is 8:00 Eastern Time. As I say, 15 or 20 minutes of a short speech, and the rest is Q and A.

I think we can now announce the reorganization of the Press Office.

First of all, Jack Hushen, who is my deputy and remains as my deputy -- and I really can't speak highly enough of Jack in terms of the help he has given me, and I hope will continue to give me. And as a reward, of course, I am going to let Jack do a lot more of the briefings. But Jack is a valuable man, and he is my deputy and will remain so.

Paul Miltich. You know Paul, most of you. He is the Special Assistant to the President for Public Affairs. He will be devoting his time to working closely with the President on various writing assignments. He helps to prepare information the President needs to bone up on before his news conferences. He oversees the preparation of the President's news summary.

He helps prepare Presidential statements, and he oversees the preparation of both Presidential and Press Office correspondence.

We are very pleased to announce that Jerry Warren is remaining at the White House on the staff as Deputy Press Secretary to the President for information liaison. He will have responsibility for keeping in touch with other information officers in the departments and agencies, and the main part of his job is to be in touch with editors and publishers and broadcast executives, editorial writers and columnists throughout the country.

Before he came to the White House, Jerry was the Assistant Managing Editor of the San Diego Union.

Jim Holland has expressed a desire to return to the private sector after five years of Government service, and we wish him well.

Larry Speakes is being promoted to Assistant Press Secretary, and he will be joining Jerry Warren's operation when I can find a replacement for him.

Bob Kelly, who has been a member of the Press Office staff since August, will also be serving in Jerry Warren's office.

Bill Roberts is being named an Assistant Press Secretary, and he will stay here in the Press Office to do what he has been doing, which is to answer your queries and to assist you in getting to where you should be to cover the President.

Lou Thompson. I think some of you are already familiar with Lou, both since he came here a couple of weeks ago and when he was at the Pentagon previously. He is being named the Assistant Press Secretary for Administration. In that capacity, he is going to take, I hope, the administrative burden away from me so that I can concentrate on preparing for these briefings and otherwise collecting and passing out information.

MORE

#71

I am going to do something that I have never done before, which is to give a medal. Lou is a resigned Army Major, and he has been presented with the Legion of Merit, which is the highest award for meritorious service granted to field grade officers. The citation reads, "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services."

It is a great-looking medal, and I hope you will wear it in your lapel. Here is the certificate that goes with it, and if this were the --

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you

MR. NESSEN: If this were the French Press Office, I would kiss you on both cheeks. (Laughter)

Q Where is he from? His hometown?

MR. NESSEN: Ames, Iowa.

Andy Falkiewicz, who has been here for two years, will be returning to the Foreign Service, and I express my appreciation to Andy for the fine job he has done. We are in the process of getting the final clearance on Andy's replacement, and we will announce that when the clearances are completed.

Q What about biographies?

MR. NESSEN: We didn't bring them out here, but we can get them for you later.

Q Is Tom DeCair staying?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is. I think we announced that a couple of weeks or a month ago.

Q What is he, an assistant?

MR. NESSEN: Assistant Press Secretary.

Q What are his duties?

MR. NESSEN: Special projects, and as I mentioned, I think, when I announced that, working with me on special projects, research, and so forth. I mean, just to give you an example, such as helping to prepare the books for the Japanese trip.

Q How many are on your staff now, total?

MR. NESSEN: We are going to tote that up. We are toting that up now because we need to come in with a figure for January 1, and I will give it to you when I have it added up. I don't have it yet.

Q The last time the Press Office was reorganized by Jerry terHorst, he said there would be no political activities in the former Clawson-Klein office. Does that still remain true?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely. I reaffirm that as strongly as I can, and I told that to Jerry, and told it to Don Rumsfeld, and to the President, that that is my intention, and I intend to stick to it.

Q Ron, the office that Jerry Warren will now head was originally set up -- at least it was my understanding it was set up -- under Herb Klein as kind of an arm, a new office that had never been established before, to bypass the White House press, and in fact to reach editors and broadcasters outside.

Is that still going to be essentially the function of that office?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not, John. The purpose of that office is to provide information, and it is essentially the same information we put out here, and other help to people who don't normally come to the White House briefing. And that includes not just people outside of Washington, but columnists and specialty magazines and so forth in Washington by way of arranging briefings on economic subjects or other subjects. But I didn't know that was the intention of the original Herb Klein operation. I don't know.

Q It was not announced, but that is what it turned out to be.

MR. NESSEN: I see. That is not the way we intend to do it.

Q Are we going to have cocktails with Warren? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I thought we would call it "Juice with Jerry". (Laughter) What's so bad with that?

Q It is my understanding that Jerry was the liaison man with San Clemente, or has been. Is he going to continue to do this? Is this over?

MR. NESSEN: Was that your former duty?

MR. WARREN: I did a little bit from the communication standpoint.

MR. NESSEN: As we said before, Jack Marsh is the liaison with San Clemente.

Before we announced this, I again made clear to Jerry that he was to sever all previous connections he had with working in that area, and he has, and he is working solely in this area now.

I don't have any more announcements today, so we will get right to the questions.

MORE

Q Ron, can you tell us whether or not the President has spoken with General Brown or with Secretary Schlesinger with relation to Brown's remarks as reported today? And is he contemplating firing him at once?

MR. NESSEN: Shall we take those one at a time?

The President considers General Brown's remarks ill-advised and poorly handled. The President feels that very strongly. I believe I saw quoted somewhere that General Brown himself has said that his remarks were ill-advised and the President certainly believes that.

The President asked me to make clear that General Brown's remarks in no way represent his views or the views of any senior officials of his Administration, military or civilian. What I am telling you is, as far as the President's reaction goes, was communicated to General Brown's superior, who is Secretary of Defense Schlesinger.

Q Ron, is the President also going to ask that General Brown either explain why he said this, where he got such incredible information, or apologize to the Jewish community? I mean, to say that they were ill-advised and so forth, poorly handled, is hardly enough, it seems to me, after making a statement like this, setting down the Jewish influence and the banks and the newspapers.

This sounds like he has been boning up on the protocols. Does he have any further thing? I mean, is General Brown going to apologize or not, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I believe you have to ask General Brown, Les. I gave you the President's reaction.

Q Ron, when you say that General Brown's remarks do not represent the views of any senior military official, does this mean that General Brown is no longer a senior military official?

MR. NESSEN: I guess we better say any other senior official.

Q In his communication to Schlesinger, has he made any suggestions about what should be done or said, anything in particular?

MR. NESSEN: He said just what I have told you, Fran.

Q Has Mr. Schlesinger been asked to formally reprimand or rebuke General Brown?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he has, Ralph.

Q Is General Brown going to stay in his job or do you expect any change in his role or title?

MR. NESSEN: I think you probably ought to ask that over at the Pentagon.

Q That is a Presidential appointment, Ron?

Q They will not respond to that, Ron.

Q That is a Presidential appointment, that is why I am asking.

MR. NESSEN: Let me come back to that. I am told that they had a briefing this morning on film that dealt entirely with the General Brown question.

Q Who is "they"?

MR. NESSEN: In the Pentagon. Was it the briefer who had the briefing?

Q Bill Beecher.

MR. NESSEN: I guess Beecher had an on-the-record, filmed briefing that dealt entirely with General Brown.

In answer to your question of whether he remains in his job, I have not heard of any plans for him not to.

Q Does the President expect General Brown to make an apology?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have expressed the President's views on this matter.

Q Does that mean he does not expect it; he has said this, and it is a closed incident as long as no one says anything else.

MR. NESSEN: This is the President's reaction to the statement.

Q Ron, the President is saying that he thinks that these statements were ill-advised and poorly handled and indeed, General Brown has said that, too. Of course, what General Brown means is that he should not have said it. He is not dealing with whether or not he should think it. The fact is this is what General Brown thinks.

Now, is the President going to let him stay in that job, considering that this is what he thinks?

MR. NESSEN: Marty, this is the President's reaction to the statement, and I emphasize to you that the President holds these feelings very strongly, and he asked me to transmit the fact that he holds these feelings very strongly. I believe we will let the President's remarks stand as they are.

Bob?

Q Ron, on a perhaps related subject, is it true that the President has received a message from the King of Saudi Arabia warning that the United States is going to have its oil cut off unless it puts heavier pressure on the Israelis?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Bob was wondering whether the President has received any communication from King Faisal concerning a threat to cut off the oil.

I just don't think we can discuss communications to the President from a head of State, if there were any such communication, Bob.

Q Is the Administration now contemplating a gasoline tax which it rejected in the past?

MR. NESSEN: I have heard nothing that leads me to believe that the President changed his position on that.

Q Ron, I don't think the statement either made by the President or what you have said here today meets the problem. General Brown made statements that disturbed greatly every Jew in the United States and there are six million of them, and a lot of other people who are interested in this.

For the President to say this is ill-advised is certainly a very pusillanimous view of it, and unless he does something about it, the only implication we can draw, the only inference I should say, is that the President is not really concerned about this. He is letting the man stay in his job, he has not contacted him personally, he has not asked him to apologize. He has done nothing about it. What kind of a situation is this?

MR. NESSEN: Is that your question, what kind of situation is this?

Q Yes, in the White House by the President.

MR. NESSEN: I have given you the President's reaction to this, which I emphasize holds quite strongly. He disassociates himself from this view expressed by General Brown. It in no way represents the views of anybody else in the Government.

Q Ron, does the President feel -- and if you have no indication of the President's feelings, do you feel -- that General Brown can continue to lead the Armed Services of the United States, which today and in the past have included many Americans of the Jewish religion, after making a statement like this?

Is he, in the White House view, still an effective leader under the President of the Armed Forces in the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I am going to stick with the reaction of the President as I have given it.

Q Ron, may I ask, has the President either heard the tape or seen a transcript of General Brown's remarks at Duke University? Do you know that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't believe he has either heard the tape or seen the transcript. He is aware of what General Brown said.

Q Let me ask you this, Ron. What would you advise American citizens, regardless of their religious backgrounds, who are angered and outraged by General Brown's statement? What would you advise them to do? How would you advise them to make their feelings known?

MR. NESSEN: I would not pretend to advise American citizens, Jim.

Q Ron, are you going to discuss this with the President and ask if General Walker -- you remember General Walker, who was removed from his command in Europe for much less than this -- are you going to discuss this, bring to the President the concern certainly that you hear in this room from Jew and Gentile alike or not?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Thank you.

Q Ron, will you address the other question of the increased staff of General Brown, which has come under criticism for going beyond the legal numbers.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know anything about that, Fran. Is that the case?

Q I ask your comments today.

MR. NESSEN: I will look into that.

Q Did the President have a telephone conversation with the Secretary of Defense?

MR. NESSEN: He did not, Jim, but this was relayed to the Secretary of Defense.

Q Did he relay anything more than this statement? Did he say that he wanted anything followed up on it or did he give anything other than this statement you have given us?

MR. NESSEN: He expressed these views that I have relayed to you.

Q May we request a press conference with the President to examine this subject and others with him?

MR. NESSEN: Request a press conference?

Q Yes, sir.

MR. NESSEN: In addition to tomorrow's press conference. Do you want one in addition to tomorrow's or what?

Q I am sorry, I had a mental lapse and I forgot about tomorrow's.

Q Ron, could I follow up on that question. I am told, this is hearsay, that Secretary Morton this morning told a number of reporters that a possible gas tax increase is now again under consideration.

Q Secretary Morton said they told this group "It is on my burner as an option. If I think it is the right way to go, I am going to present it to the President."

MR. NESSEN: My understanding of Secretary Morton's remarks is that he said this is one of a number of options, and that he was not endorsing this option. Obviously, it is something that has been around for a long time as an option, and I have heard nothing to indicate to me that the President intends to change his mind about not increasing the gasoline excise tax.

Q Ron, in view of what the President said in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, among other places, how can this be considered an option? He said he definitely is not going to do it, he is not going to do it now, and he is never going to do it. Where does that leave it as an option?

MR. NESSEN: You don't destroy ideas by saying you are not going to put them into effect.

Q But/options are possible actions, things that you are considering as possible actions.

MR. NESSEN: I think it depends on what your definition of an option is. Let me just say what the facts are. As I understand Secretary Morton's remarks, it is an idea that is there and thought about by people, and at the White House there is no change that I am aware of in the President's opposition to it.

Q Ron, you say that the President did not communicate directly with either Secretary Schlesinger or General Brown on this issue?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q How did he get the message to Schlesinger?

MR. NESSEN: We have lots of folks here in the building with telephones.

Q Did he send a message or written note or telephone?

MR. NESSEN: Telephone.

Q Ron, may I ask a follow-up question to that. As I read through any notes on the General Brown question, we can see that President Ford is sorely displeased with General Brown's remarks. Can we safely assume that the President has, through normal channels, Secretary Schlesinger, reprimanded General Brown?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to read these remarks and decide whether it is not -- when the President of the United States tells one of his Generals that the General's remarks were ill-advised and poorly handled and do not represent Administration policy or thinking, I don't know what else you could call that.

Q Was that specifically conveyed to General Brown?

MR. NESSEN: That is what I have said.

Q Ron, when and how did the President learn of General Brown's remarks?

MR. NESSEN: I am not exactly sure how the President learned about them. The White House learned about them before they were published in the newspaper.

Q How long before, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Several days.

Q When was the reprimand conveyed to Secretary Schlesinger to convey to General Brown, immediately after you learned of it or after it appeared in the newspapers?

MR. NESSEN: It was conveyed this morning.

Q Why was it not conveyed at the time that you learned of it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

Q Could you find out?

MR. NESSEN: I could try to find out.

Q Ron, you left open the possibility that there might be further study or further action concerning General Brown, but at the same time, you have not said that there is going to be any further study or action concerning him. You also said when asked if he is going to be remaining in his job, "I have not heard of any plans for him not to."

This, once again, is the kind of answer you sometimes get when you are trying to say that you yourself don't know, but you have not really found out for sure one way or another.

Can you tell us one way or another? Will he remain or will he not; and if you don't know, can you check it for us?

MR. NESSEN: I have to tell you what I said before, which is I don't know of any plans for him not to remain in his job.

Q Ron, if I might follow up on that question, I asked a moment ago and didn't get an answer, is it conceivable to you as Press Secretary to the President that any responsible White House official would have known about that, whether several days ago, and permitted a delay in telling the President about it?

MR. NESSEN: I just would rather not speculate on it, John.

Q Can you say who learned of it at that time?

MR. NESSEN: The White House learned of it at that time, Marty.

Q Did you learn of it through the Post story or did you learn it through our own sources? I mean, did you learn of it through the news media or not?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, was it brought to your attention --

MR. NESSEN: That is what John is asking, and it is a piece of the puzzle that I don't know the answer to.

Q Ron, do you know whether the President has heard any complaint from Jewish friends of his or other prominent leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard him say if he did.

Q Could I rephrase that? I don't consider this specifically a problem of one religion, so I would like to ask and rephrase Bill's question. Has he heard from any of his friends about this incident?

MR. NESSEN: I hope that some of us who were in his office this morning are his friends and he heard about it from us.

Q I don't think that is what he has in mind.

MR. NESSEN: On the outside?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q Ron, are we to understand that someone unidentified in the White House knew about this several days ago and that the President only knew about it this morning? Is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I said that, did I?

Q Oh. Well, then, the President knew about it before, but it was all hushed up until it broke in the Post this morning, and now the President is indicating his displeasure, but did not do it before?

MR. NESSEN: Is that a question?

Q Yes, sir, that is a question. Did the President indicate his displeasure only when it became public information, or did he do it beforehand?

MR. NESSEN: Les, may I say to you that we are dealing here with a problem of a man who has made ill-advised and poorly handled remarks. I do believe that part of the project that we are all involved in here, which is to get out news to the American people, and I said this my first day here -- part of the project that we are all involved in is to change the mood of these briefings, which for five years has deteriorated into something that serves neither the public, the press, nor the White House. I think the briefings require a degree of civility, and I would hope that we can maintain a degree of civility.

Q Very civilly, I would like to ask --

MR. NESSEN: You often do not display civility.

Q I am sorry.

Ron, can you answer the question?

MR. NESSEN: Next question.

Q The next question is what do you mean by poorly handled? I put that into the context of Brown's remarks.

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand why that needs further elaboration, Helen.

Q You said they are ill-advised and poorly handled. Poorly handled by whom? You mean Brown poorly handled it?

MR. NESSEN: General Brown's remarks were ill-advised and poorly handled.

I understand the point you have all made, and I told Les that I would relay to the President the extremely strong feeling in this room and presumably on the outside. I am not sure we need to pick the President's statement apart word by word. I believe that everyone here understands how strongly the President feels, and if you don't, I can re-emphasize again how strongly the President feels.

Q Without picking apart the President's statement, I would like to ask you a question that I am confused about with respect to the timing. If the President knew about General Brown's --

MR. NESSEN: Jim, let me just stop you. In answer to John's question, I am aware that someone in the White House knew about this at least several days ago. The reason I cannot tell you when the President knew is because I don't know when the President knew. He may have known several days ago; he may not have known until this morning. I simply don't know that piece of the puzzle.

Q In that case, it was conceivably not the President. If a White House staff member knew about it several days ago and if that White House staff member and others in the White House were indignant about General Brown's statement, why was there no reprimand or admonishment delivered to General Brown at that time?

MR. NESSEN: I simply can't answer your question because I don't know who knew or when the President knew, at that time.

Q Could you find out for us by chance when the President actually was informed of General Brown's statement?

MR. NESSEN: Obviously that is the central point we are not able to clean up today, and I will.

Q Ron, do you know how this information got to the White House? Was it from a complaint? Did it funnel up through the Pentagon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how the information got here.

Q Ron, on Bob Pierpoint's question, you don't mean to suggest that a threat to impose an oil embargo against the people of the United States is a private concern of the President? Why can't you address the substance of the question?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the substance of the question was had a message been received from King Faisal.

Q No, had a threat been received from King Faisal to impose an oil embargo.

Q Has a message been received from Saudi Arabia? May I restate the question. Has the Government of Saudi Arabia warned the United States that it might impose an oil embargo if additional pressure is not put on the Israeli Government?

MR. NESSEN: Let me say first that I don't think we can talk about any communications, if there were any, between a foreign government and the President. Having said that, I want to say that I am not aware of any communication from Saudi Arabia.

Q Ron, could I try to ask a very civil question?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to see you try to ask a civil question. (Laughter)

Q Ron, when somebody in the White House discovered that Mr. Gibson was getting a lot of money from an oil company and apparently this did not reach the President and now we get a situation that someone, again unidentified, learned about General Brown's statements but again presumably it did not reach the President because I imagine the President would be immediately indignant if it did.

Now, I just wonder if you could give us, Ron, any kind of a guidance as to what is happening here. When the White House learns these things, gosh, it sounds like the President is not being informed, Ron, and this is a grim situation. I am wondering if you could shed some light on it, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: All I can say is that the President is amazingly well informed about a broad range of subjects, and it constantly amazes me with the amount of knowledge and information he has, and he is informed of all important issues in a timely and orderly way.

Q Does he feel that he is being completely informed when he missed the boat on a couple of things now or seems to have?

MR. NESSEN: I think we said that the Gibson thing was -- I forgot how we said it was handled, but --

Q Imperfectly?

MR. NESSEN: Imperfectly.

Q Ill-advised.

Q Ron, who is it that decides that information such as this can be kept from the President?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are making a terrible leap when you say that information is being kept from the President. It is not.

Q All right, makes the decision not to tell the President about something.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that there was a conscious decision made not to tell the President about anything. You know, one of the points about the way the White House is organized now is that he has input from a wide range of people, both inside and outside the White House.

Q Ron, when did you discuss the matter?

MR. NESSEN: Which matter?

Q The Brown matter.

MR. NESSEN: The Brown matter, this morning.

Q Ron, could you assume we might be able to clean up some of this story later in the day? Could you take two or three of these questions about when the President --

MR. NESSEN: We take all the questions that are left hanging. That is why Joy is here. Aside from looking nice, she also writes down the unanswered questions.

Q -- and get back to us this afternoon on this, please.

MR. NESSEN: We do that. Don't we post answers?

Q This would be a good time to start the 4:00 briefing.

Q Mr. Rumsfeld ended up assuming responsibility for this. Can you tell us who ultimately will assume the responsibility for either telling or not telling the President about this? Is there some question as to whether the President knew in advance of the newspapers? If there is to be a Rumsfeld-type scapegoat in the General Brown affair, will you please tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I got really lost in that question, the Gibsons and the Browns here.

Q You remember yesterday that you came up and told us that Mr. Rumsfeld said that he would assume responsibility for the imperfect handling. Inasmuch as someone here in the White House knew in advance of General Brown's remarks prior to their publication in the newspaper, will you at some point tell us who that someone was as you have in the Gibson nomination?

MR. NESSEN: I will certainly try and find out.

Q Thank you.

Q Ron, can I go back to the gas tanks question, please. You said, "I am not aware of any change in the President's opposition of it."

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you be as specific as the President was last month in his speeches when he said time and time again he was totally opposed, I think the whole time, at least in the immediate future, to any increase in the Federal tax on gasoline?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever he said then is his position today as far as I know, and I have heard him talk about this issue since then and I see no change in his attitude.

Q Ron, did the President have a meeting last night on the coal strike, and what was discussed in that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that the President did have a meeting last night on the coal strike.

The President generally believes that the talks are moving ahead and making progress under collective bargaining, and he hopes that the strike will be settled this week. The White House is in touch with the Government officials who are responsible for following the situation. Certainly the collective bargaining system seems to be working in this case, the differences are being narrowed, and he hopes for a settlement.

Q Ron, might I ask you a question about your statements yesterday on the economic situation and the surtax?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You said at one point the President was not wedded to 5 percent, but that he was wedded to the surtax as a means of raising the revenue needed for the various programs that you have outlined.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Does this mean that the President would accept a different percentage, just as a hypothetical example 10 percent, on a different level of income -- for example, \$25,000 instead of \$15,000 -- would he accept some change or revision of that nature?

Secondly, is he in effect inviting Congress to do something along that line?

Thirdly, has he any idea for raising the additional revenue that would be needed if the percentage and the income were higher? In other words, it has been estimated that the type of situation I outlined would cut in half the revenue that would have come from the original proposals.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Does he have any proposals for raising that additional? I have three questions; I am sorry.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I have three answers.

Let's see if I can remember what your questions were. The President's basic interest in proposing the surtax was to raise the necessary money to pay for the anti-recession parts of his program.

Now if Congress wants to change the formula, he is certainly willing to take a look at it if it reaches the same goal, which is to raise the money needed to pay for these anti-recession aspects.

Q If it does not reach the same goal,--I think the figure was just under \$5 billion, if I am correct -- \$4.7 or something like that. If it does not reach the same goal, does the President have any idea what he would like Congress to do to make up the difference?

MR. NESSEN: No. He anticipates that Congress would act in a responsible way here and not add any further net increase to the budget, and would act responsibly by finding a way to raise this money to pay for the two other parts of the program.

Q Were you in effect inviting Congress yesterday to do those two things, to change the formula and to find other ways of raising additional money?

MR. NESSEN: Speaking of money, anybody that wants to go see the Mint Director present the coins should go to the side door right now.

I don't think it was an invitation, Jim. The President's invitation to Congress is to pass his economic program and stop sitting back and taking pot shots at it without doing anything about it.

Now, if another formula that has the same effect is more acceptable to Congress, he is willing to take a look at it. I don't think he is inviting them to throw his overboard. Congress has not done a thing about any of those points.

Q Ron, could I ask a question on a statement you made on November 5 to get clarification?

MR. NESSEN: All right.

Q You said the United States recognizes the full consideration that must be given to the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people.

I did check with the State Department. They said these interests had not yet been determined. I am just wondering, how can we be in favor of considering something that has not been determined? Since it was your statement, you may be quoting 242.

Do you have any idea of what you mean by legitimate, and what the considerations are?

MR. NESSEN: What is 242?

Q U.N. Resolution 242.

MR. NESSEN: Oh, that 242. That is where that language comes from.

Q Yes. I just wondered, Ron, did you have anything specific in mind, or is it just undetermined?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think the answer to your question is that my answer really is the same as the State Department's answer.

You asked about biographies of the Press Office, and they will be in the bins at the conclusion of this briefing.

The recissions and deferrals announcement will be available in the Press Office.

I do want to clear up something now that John started, and it seemed to get further and further away from what I said over here. I do not know when the President learned of General Brown's statements, so I don't want you to go away from here with the idea that I am saying that he learned about it from the newspapers this morning.

At one point, I said that is a piece of the puzzle that I don't know the answer to. I simply don't know when he learned about the Brown remarks, so let's be straight about that.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(12:47 P.M. EST)