

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#105

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:30 P.M. EST

DECEMBER 19, 1974

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President, as you know, went to Alexandria this morning. At 12:45 p.m., the President will present to General Andrew J. Goodpaster the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the highest noncombat award.

At 2:00 o'clock this afternoon, the President will have another session with Roy Ash and the OMB people to continue making his decisions on the 1976 budget.

At 3:30 p.m., the President will meet with his energy advisers to receive their views, which were put together at their meeting at Camp David last weekend, and some other work they have done since they came back from Camp David. There will be no decisions made this afternoon. We do not plan any announcements after the meeting or a briefing after the meeting.

The President and Mrs. Ford, as you know, will be the hosts at a Christmas party for you and your colleagues in the press from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the House.

I think, what is being passed out now are three releases; one of them is the nomination of Joe Laitin, to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

The President is nominating Joe Laitin to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. He is also nominating -- that job pays \$38,000 a year -- Robert J. Corber is being nominated to be a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. We were checking that salary. And also, the President has made a preliminary selection, pending all clearances, of 11 members of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation.

Q Does that pay?

MR. NESSEN: That is a full-time job.

Q Paying what?

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MR. NESSEN: I will check that.

Let me give you some thoughts about Rockefeller. The Rockefeller swearing in ceremony -- I am told the time is still up in the air, but it is looking like it might be more early evening than late afternoon.

The Senate Press, Radio, TV and Photographic Galleries are handling the press arrangements for the ceremony itself. We plan, here, to have full press coverage of the arrival at the White House of Governor and Mrs. Rockefeller and their two children preceding the swearing in ceremony. That will take place at the South Portico about an hour before the ceremony itself. Unfortunately, there is no way to know what time that is going to be, but we will keep you advised.

Then, there will be full press coverage of the departures from the South Portico by President and Mrs. Ford, Governor and Mrs. Rockefeller and their families about 15 minutes before the ceremony begins at the Hill. Families will travel to the Capitol in a motorcade, and there will be the standard White House travel pool, plus a special pool, which Governor Rockefeller is bringing with him. That is four people, I am told.

On arrival at the Capitol, the two press pools will be conducted to the hall outside the Senate Chamber and will wait there until the ceremony is over. The travel pool will not go inside the Senate Chamber for the ceremony.

When the ceremony concludes, the President and Mrs. Ford will leave the Capitol for the White House with the Presidential travel pool accompanying them. The Vice-President and his family accompanied by their travel pool will attend a reception on Capitol Hill and, then, following that, will come to the White House. We do not plan any coverage of their returns to the White House because they will be coming separately, and they will just come in the backdoor.

Now, how this is going to affect the Press Party I don't know, because we do not know what the times are. I was talking to Mrs. Ford -- which is why I was somewhat delayed -- and she is concerned about this, and I think we will just have to wait and see how the times run and when the swearing in is.

Q Is there any chance of the time of the party being changed until later or something?

MR. NESSEN: She is thinking of that. That is why she called me. I have to talk to Nancy Lammerding after this briefing. As soon as we get a better idea, we will get the word out.

We have a few more details on coverage at Vail. Actually, we have a lot more details.

The Legal Services Board will set the salaries for the officers and employees, so we do not have that yet. The rates cannot be more than Level 5, which is \$138 a day.

The ICC guy gets \$38,000 a year.

Q Is this for three years or two years, or at the pleasure of the President, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that, but I will check it for you. It is on the sheet, I am told, "Term of Office."

Sunday at Vail -- the President does plan to ski Sunday afternoon after he gets there, and our plan is to get everybody, the entire press party, to the bottom of the slope so you will have him and his family there at the bottom getting on the lift and riding up and, then, you will be there as he arrives at the bottom after his run.

Now, Sunday evening, after the ticket office closes, Vail Associates will open its office to give you members of the press who are going lift passes to use yourselves. It should only take a couple of minutes. They take your picture and they laminate it, and these are free lift passes for members of the Press Corps and not their families.

Q Is that a coverage pass, or --

MR. NESSEN: It is to ride up and down and cover events.

Q My question is, is it limited?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, I said the wrong thing. It is to use to go up to ski down for your own entertainment.

Q Do you know what the charge is for members of families?

MR. NESSEN: Ray Zook probably has a rundown on the fees out there. He sent me one the other day on ice-skating.

Q Ron, will we be able to have a pool 50 percent up and then at the top?

MR. NESSEN: Let me go through the rest of the coverage plans and you will see that is going to get done.

On Monday I hope we can get into some kind of daily routine. The basic thought about a daily routine is to have a protective pool each day that would cover that entire day's events.

Eric went out there this morning, and I told Eric by the time we get there he should have posted the protective pool for each day we are going to be there so you can plan your week ahead of time. But whoever is on the protective pool for each day is responsible for pooling every activity that day, whatever the President might do that day. That includes skiing, if he goes skiing, or if he goes out to eat, or to a party, or whatever he does.

As I told you yesterday, the plan -- and Mrs. Ford just confirmed it to me -- is for him to work about four hours a day and relax about four hours a day. The morning work would conclude about 11:00 or 11:30, and then he would go out to ski.

Now on Monday we will have the protective pool for that day at the bottom of the hill, and Eric will be there, and he will tell you which slope he will come down, and where he will end up at the bottom, and so forth.

Just to anticipate your concern, the protective pool is for protection, and obviously you must have in your mind the possibility that the President could sprain an ankle or something, and I am told the bottom of the hill is the place to be if anything like that should happen.

Q Are there telephones there?

MR. NESSEN: There is a restaurant there. Maybe if we talk to Eric on the phone we can find out something about phones there.

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Q Has he ever sprained an ankle or broken a leg before?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Before we go on to more of the day-to-day arrangements, the President feels about his visit to Vail that he is only one of the visitors to Vail during the Christmas season, and that a lot of people who have no connection whatever to the White House are going to be there on vacations, and a lot of them have spent a lot of money for vacations at Vail at Christmastime. So the President's attitude -- and he has communicated it to the staff -- is that what we do should disrupt the paying vacationers as little as possible, and that he would hope that you would follow the same philosophy that the White House is following.

He does understand the need to cover the President of the United States. And he understands the need for a protective pool. And so whenever possible we are going to have one with him.

Now on Tuesday -- that is the day of the coverage on the slopes -- we are going to get some snowmobiles and do some other things to try to get film and photographs and coverage of the President, and perhaps some members of his family too.

Our plan was to break the press corps into groups and have the groups stationed at various points on the mountain, some at the top, some on the way down, and some at the bottom. And obviously, with that kind of military precision there is just no way that this is not going to disrupt the skiing of the paying customers, and I would hope that one day of this would be enough to satisfy everybody's interest in skiing pictures, and, after that one day of Tuesday of getting everybody clinging to precipices half-way down --

Q Would you get him to yell something for radio as he comes down? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: After that one day of that spread-out coverage all over the mountain we will go back to the standard protective pool at the bottom.

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On briefings, I think given the fact he is going to work until 11:00 or 11:30 every morning, and I am going to need some time to talk to him and to Don, and also talk to the offices back here, I think we probably ought to shoot for a noon briefing. It is 2:00 in the east, and obviously it is not going to make the afternoon papers happy, but I think it is probably the best we can do.

Q That does not bar us from getting some information earlier?

MR. NESSEN: No. Just like here. We are in the office from 7:00 on, Helen. You know that. Certainly we are going to have information available whenever it is available, but to have a real briefing, I just do not think we are going to have the information we need, either from the President or from the offices back here.

He is taking a lot of work out there, and especially a pile of bills that Congress will pass in the last days, so that will certainly provide some news at the beginning at least, and then there will be other things as we go along. Budget and State of the Union, of course, are two of the things he will be working on too.

The protective pools will basically consist of the AP and UPI, and the AP and UPI photographers, and a writer either from a newspaper or magazine, a broadcast correspondent, a pool television crew, a local writer, and a local still photographer. That will be the protective pool. And as I said, Eric hopefully will have the names posted for each day of the stay out there.

On the way out there you will get some maps of Vail, and also a book that the people in Vail have put together to tell you about the place, and it will help you to find your way around.

I think we mentioned to you that casual dress is correct for Vail, and warm clothing, and we are also going to have a shuttle bus running around town to help you get around, and also the information on how to get your credentials, and how to get your lift passes, and so forth.

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Q Is this a special bus you are putting on? There is a shuttle service there.

MR. NESSEN: I know there is. I think it is once an hour, or once every half-hour, but this will be our own press corps shuttle bus.

So, we are moving right along with the Vail plans. I think that is basically the announcements that I have today.

Q Ron, is there anything you can tell us on steel?

Q. Ron, may I renew my question on the pool on Sunday. At the top, as the President gets off, will we be able to have a pool up there?

MR. NESSEN: It is my understanding it is not a pool, Phil. It is open coverage. I think I explained yesterday that the press plane will land at Grand Junction two hours ahead of the President, and that the people who want to go on to Vail to cover his arrival there will leap on a bus and drive straight on. It is three hours. And then those who would rather stay behind in Grand Junction and see his arrival there can stay if they want to. We will fill up as many buses and take them right in to Vail as we can, and then you will go out to the house and cover his arrival there.

Q You are talking about getting everybody at the bottom of the slope.

MR. NESSEN: On Sunday.

Q On Sunday.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q I am just talking about coverage at the top.

MR. NESSEN: Not on the first day. There is not going to be a protective pool at the top any day, which includes Sunday.

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Q Ron, is any kind of ceremony planned for his arrival like a welcome by city officials, or anything like that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of anything, Russ, but as I say, Eric went out there this morning and I will be talking to him once he gets on the ground, and we will just relay to you, as we get it from Eric, what the plans are out there.

There is one thing I forgot to tell you about Rockefeller, incidentally. His Press Office says that he and his family are going to leave New York about 3:00 on a plane from Westchester Airport and arrive at Page Terminal at National at 3:45, and they will go from there to the Rockefeller home on Foxhall Road, and will stay there until it is time to come to the White House.

Q How about steel, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: On steel, what did you want to know?

Q Has the president decided to do anything more than leave it in the hands of the Wage-Price people?

MR. NESSEN: The question really is premature because -- I mean the process is under way now. U.S. Steel is going to come in with its written justification tomorrow, and based on what they say, and how the Wage and Price Stability Council feels about it, there could be additional Presidential actions, but we have to wait and see how they explain it, and whether the Wage and Price Stability Council -- what reaction it has to their explanation.

Q Ron, U.S. Steel maintains that most of its increases are catch-up increases. Is it true that the White House has no quarrel with catch-up increases?

MR. NESSEN: I think we really have to wait for them to send in their written justification and let the Council make that judgment, that very judgment.

Q So when you are talking about rolling back their prices, are you leaving the door open to rolling it back and below what they consider catch-up prices?

MR. NESSEN: It is something I really cannot do. The Wage and Price Stability Council has this thing under way, and they will make a ruling on what they think of the U.S. Steel explanation of it.

Q Ron, has the President sent a letter to Senator Jackson offering a compromise on the Strip Mining Bill?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any letter on the Strip Mining.

Q Has he made any other approach?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any approach. I think the matter pretty much stands where we talked about it yesterday, which is, he has announced his plan to veto the bill as it is, and the only decision there is whether a real veto or a pocket veto.

Senator Jackson's staff has sent a request in here asking that the White House try to find room for a compromise, and the compromise would be carried out by a second bill that would correct some of the deficiencies the President sees in the first bill. And the Administration is actively working on suggestions for a draft bill that might make these corrections.

I think Frank told you on Saturday that the Administration has, for a long time, believed in the need for strip mining legislation that would be balanced between the desire to protect the environment and to reclaim land, and also the need to increase coal production because of the energy problem, and the desire to reduce the reliance on oil. So I think the way it stands is that the President is anxious to achieve acceptable legislation without further delay.

I think the President's advisors would recommend that he accept the present bill, if Congress passes another bill which makes the corrections he outlined at this session.

Q Ron, was the President totally unaware of Mr. Bass's interest in strip mining when he agreed to accept the house?

MR. NESSEN: The President told me this morning -- and if you would like to quote this you may -- "The first time I knew he owned one ounce of coal was when I read it at 7:00 a.m. in the New York Times." And as Jack told some of you yesterday -- Hushen -- the President does not make environmental policy decisions based on whose house he is renting for Christmas.

Q Ron, could you tell us if the President is contemplating having a news conference before he goes to Vail, and if you can't answer that, can you rule one out?

MR. NESSEN: I just do not have anything to give you on a news conference today, Walt.

Q How about tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have anything to give you on a news conference, period.

Q Can you rule one out in Vail?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans to have one in Vail.

Q Ron, yesterday, I think, in giving us a capsule biography of Mr. Bass, you mentioned he was a geologist and that he has holdings in mineral, or in any case, extracting industries. Did no one go beyond that and find out whether he was in oil or coal or what?

MR. NESSEN: I can tell you how this biography came about. I anticipated that there would be some interest in who Dick Bass was. I talked to him on the telephone Tuesday, December 17th and asked him to tell me who he was, and this is what he gave me.

Q You did not ask him whether he was in coal or oil?

MR. NESSEN: I did not know that it really mattered. The answer is, I did not.

Q Does the President plan any actions on bills today?

MR. NESSEN: There is getting to be quite a pile of them here.

Q How many, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: No. I guess there are maybe in the area of about a half dozen that need to be thought about sooner or need to have decisions made on them soon.

Just to finish -- Helen, I do not know of any that we will be announcing today.

Q What about the Nixon tapes' bill?

MR. NESSEN: No decision, but very soon.

Q You have to act --

MR. NESSEN: -- by midnight tomorrow.

Q Is the President likely to sign the transportation bill, which permits bigger trucks on highways?

MR. NESSEN: I did not even know about that one. That is not one of the six. Is it up here, or is it still on the Hill?

Q Here.

Q They completed work yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: I have not looked into that one, but I tell you, from what I have heard here this morning, there are a lot of them and many of them are complicated. The trade bill, for instance, is 180 pages, I am told, and aside from the ones that have deadlines on them, like the Nixon tapes' bill, I expect that that is going to take up a lot of the work in his first few days out there. I would expect you will be getting a lot of announcements in Vail of bill signings or vetoes.

Q What do you think the President will do when the food aid increase bill comes back from the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: The which one?

Q The food aid increase.

MR. NESSEN: The President saw some of the material sent to him for him to make his decision on, and he asked for additional material and that is being prepared and sent to him, so the decision has slipped a little bit on that one.

Q That is food aid?

MR. NESSEN: Food aid, yes, international food aid.

Q Ron, did the Secretary of State and the Israeli Ambassador have an angry argument in the White House near midnight either last night or the night before?

MR. NESSEN: I am told there was no meeting last night between the Ambassador --

Q How about the night before?

MR. NESSEN: They had dinner at the Golda Meir Dinner and, then, I am told, the Ambassador went home and the Secretary went home and did not have any private meetings.

Q And there was none the night before either?

MR. NESSEN: I did not check the night before. I thought the story said last night.

Q Well, it did, but there was some question as to whether last night was the last night here or last night, the night before that.

MR. NESSEN: I will check. I have not heard anything to indicate they ever had this kind of meeting that the Israeli paper talked about.

Q Ron, on the strip mining bill, you did mean to say, didn't you, that the President hoped that another bill could be passed this session?

MR. NESSEN: I hope that is clear now that it is not a question of sign this one and hoping for the best next time to correct it. He would consider signing this one, or would sign this one, if the corrective bill is passed now, before Congress goes home, so he could sign both at the same time.

Q There is not considered to be any realistic chance of that is there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim. You have to check the Hill.

Q Would you anticipate there would be a realistic chance?

MR. NESSEN: The White House would like to have realistic strip mining legislation, and so, we would like it.

Q Can you give us specifics on this corrective legislation that is needed?

MR. NESSEN: I have a transcript of Zarb's briefing from Saturday. I am not an expert on strip mining, but I think he pointed out -- I think the main complaint is the ambiguity of some of the language that is open to various interpretations. He is concerned and the President is concerned that the language is ambiguous and would result in a very large number of lawsuits.

Let me start back again then and tell you the five specific objections to it, if I may.

Number one, the changes that the White House would like made are, one, revising the scope of the citizens' suits provision so as to reduce the regulatory uncertainties, which is what I started to talk about, which could cause unnecessary production losses through extended and extensive lawsuits.

Q Could you run through that once more?

MR. NESSEN: You were here on Saturday. I am just telling you the same thing Frank told you.

Q To reduce what?

MR. NESSEN: To reduce the regulatory uncertainties which could otherwise cause unnecessary production losses through extended and extensive lawsuits.

The second objection is -- and I should say, the second correction the President would like would be to authorize the Secretary of Interior, to designate him as the one whose definitions would govern the interpretation of ambiguous terms in the legislation.

Q That is the Secretary of Interior's interpretation?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, authorize him to define the ambiguous terms.

Q The Secretary, or Frank Zarb in this case?

MR. NESSEN: The Secretary of Interior is Rogers Morton.

Q To designate the Secretary.

MR. NESSEN: No, no. The correction the White House would like to make is to designate the Interior Secretary as the one who would make the definitions.

The third correction would be to qualify what the White House considers the unnecessarily rigid prohibition against increased siltation which -- you know what that means. It has to do with silt getting into water systems that are near the strip mining operation.

The fourth correction would be to qualify the prohibitions in the bill that have to do with alluvial valley floors and hydrology which again has to do with -- just to put it in simple language -- qualifying prohibitions dealing with rivers and other waterways that might be affected by strip mining.

Fifth, the correction that the White House would like would be to focus this -- there is a reclamation fund in the bill -- to focus the use of this fund and also to reduce the excise tax on coal as an anti-inflationary measure.

There are several other minor changes in the bill too. But if that gives you an idea, I would not go into the others, if that is all right.

Q Does the White House have someone to introduce the bill today?

MR. NESSEN: I think they are working with people on the Hill, Helen. I do not have an up-to-the-minute report on how it is coming along.

Q Did the initiative for this possible compromise come from the White House or from Senator Jackson?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that his staff got in touch and said, "Let's see if we can work out a compromise."

Q When do you expect a Cabinet appointment?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have any idea, Carroll.

Q Any more this week?

MR. NESSEN: We only have one more day, or two more days. I don't know, Helen. We will have to announce it when it comes out of the hopper.

Q When are you expecting an announcement of a replacement for Mr. Ash?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you anything on time tables, Jim. Mostly because I do not have a time table.

Q How about Levi?

MR. NESSEN: We are not announcing any Cabinet changes today.

Q Will the President then hold off any nominations until the new Congress?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in sending them up for confirmation. If he does not make them before tomorrow, I guess he will have to send them up to the new Congress. That is the only Congress we have got.

Q I am talking about making the nominations in the interim.

MR. NESSEN: I see what you mean. It is possible he could make some. They all have to go through the confirmation process, but he could make some between now and January 14.

Q Would he make any as recess appointments then and not submit them until some other action is taken?

MR. NESSEN: I see what you are getting at. No, not that I know of.

Q Don Rumsfeld yesterday did not want to go into the manner in which the President plans to use the Vice-President.

MR. NESSEN: I talked to the President this morning about that because I thought you might be interested in it and I do not think it was a question of Don not wanting to go into it. It was a question of it seemed improper to do because if you started making plans for Governor Rockefeller's role or staff you were presuming a confirmation which had not taken place.

The fact is that the President indicated this morning that now that Governor Rockefeller is confirmed and will be sworn in this evening, that he will sit down and discuss it and will indicate to Governor Rockefeller what activities the President intends for him to get into.

Q You cannot tell us anything about what his thinking is.

MR. NESSEN: Only what he said himself which is he would like him to play a role in domestic policies. There are certain things the Vice-President does by statute. I do not have those right in front of me, but you probably know what they are. For the rest of it, they have not had their talk and the President has not instructed him as to what he wants him to do.

Q Will he be coming out to Vail, Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Has the President learned anything by being Vice-President himself that he would like to pass along?

MR. NESSEN: I think that might be something they will talk about. There are no specifics.

Q Specifically, Ron, is the President considering the establishment of a new Domestic Policy Board that presumably would replace the Domestic Council in naming Vice-President Rockefeller as Chairman of that Board?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I have read that, Jim, but I have not heard it discussed in any way around here.

Q That is not a matter under consideration as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: That I am aware of, that is right.

Q Ron, have you heard discussed the possibility that a successor to Ken Cole will not be named but that Vice-President Rockefeller would assume those duties?

MR. NESSEN: I do not think Vice-President Rockefeller can assume Ken Cole's duties. Ken is the Executive Director of the Domestic Council, running it on a day-to-day basis, which is a full time job, and I do not see that as Vice-President Rockefeller's job.

Q Is the President speaking at the inaugural?

MR. NESSEN: No, not that I know of.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

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Q Ron, will we be able to have a pool 50 percent up and then at the top?

MR. NESSEN: Let me go through the rest of the coverage plans and you will see that is going to get done.

On Monday I hope we can get into some kind of daily routine. The basic thought about a daily routine is to have a protective pool each day that would cover that entire day's events.

Eric went out there this morning, and I told Eric by the time we get there he should have posted the protective pool for each day we are going to be there so you can plan your week ahead of time. But whoever is on the protective pool for each day is responsible for pooling every activity that day, whatever the President might do that day. That includes skiing, if he goes skiing, or if he goes out to eat, or to a party, or whatever he does.

As I told you yesterday, the plan -- and Mrs. Ford just confirmed it to me -- is for him to work about four hours a day and relax about four hours a day. The morning work would conclude about 11:00 or 11:30, and then he would go out to ski.

Now on Monday we will have the protective pool for that day at the bottom of the hill, and Eric will be there, and he will tell you which slope he will come down, and where he will end up at the bottom, and so forth.

Just to anticipate your concern, the protective pool is for protection, and obviously you must have in your mind the possibility that the President could sprain an ankle or something, and I am told the bottom of the hill is the place to be if anything like that should happen.

Q Are there telephones there?

MR. NESSEN: There is a restaurant there. Maybe if we talk to Eric on the phone we can find out something about phones there.

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Q Has he ever sprained an ankle or broken a leg before?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Before we go on to more of the day-to-day arrangements, the President feels about his visit to Vail that he is only one of the visitors to Vail during the Christmas season, and that a lot of people who have no connection whatever to the White House are going to be there on vacations, and a lot of them have spent a lot of money for vacations at Vail at Christmastime. So the President's attitude -- and he has communicated it to the staff -- is that what we do should disrupt the paying vacationers as little as possible, and that he would hope that you would follow the same philosophy that the White House is following.

He does understand the need to cover the President of the United States. And he understands the need for a protective pool. And so whenever possible we are going to have one with him.

Now on Tuesday -- that is the day of the coverage on the slopes -- we are going to get some snowmobiles and do some other things to try to get film and photographs and coverage of the President, and perhaps some members of his family too.

Our plan was to break the press corps into groups and have the groups stationed at various points on the mountain, some at the top, some on the way down, and some at the bottom. And obviously, with that kind of military precision there is just no way that this is not going to disrupt the skiing of the paying customers, and I would hope that one day of this would be enough to satisfy everybody's interest in skiing pictures, and, after that one day of Tuesday of getting everybody clinging to precipices half-way down --

Q Would you get him to yell something for radio as he comes down? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: After that one day of that spread-out coverage all over the mountain we will go back to the standard protective pool at the bottom.

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On briefings, I think given the fact he is going to work until 11:00 or 11:30 every morning, and I am going to need some time to talk to him and to Don, and also talk to the offices back here, I think we probably ought to shoot for a noon briefing. It is 2:00 in the east, and obviously it is not going to make the afternoon papers happy, but I think it is probably the best we can do.

Q That does not bar us from getting some information earlier?

MR. NESSEN: No. Just like here. We are in the office from 7:00 on, Helen. You know that. Certainly we are going to have information available whenever it is available, but to have a real briefing, I just do not think we are going to have the information we need, either from the President or from the offices back here.

He is taking a lot of work out there, and especially a pile of bills that Congress will pass in the last days, so that will certainly provide some news at the beginning at least, and then there will be other things as we go along. Budget and State of the Union, of course, are two of the things he will be working on too.

The protective pools will basically consist of the AP and UPI, and the AP and UPI photographers, and a writer either from a newspaper or magazine, a broadcast correspondent, a pool television crew, a local writer, and a local still photographer. That will be the protective pool. And as I said, Eric hopefully will have the names posted for each day of the stay out there.

On the way out there you will get some maps of Vail, and also a book that the people in Vail have put together to tell you about the place, and it will help you to find your way around.

I think we mentioned to you that casual dress is correct for Vail, and warm clothing, and we are also going to have a shuttle bus running around town to help you get around, and also the information on how to get your credentials, and how to get your lift passes, and so forth.

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Q Is this a special bus you are putting on? There is a shuttle service there.

MR. NESSEN: I know there is. I think it is once an hour, or once every half-hour, but this will be our own press corps shuttle bus.

So, we are moving right along with the Vail plans. I think that is basically the announcements that I have today.

Q Ron, is there anything you can tell us on steel?

Q Ron, may I renew my question on the pool on Sunday. At the top, as the President gets off, will we be able to have a pool up there?

MR. NESSEN: It is my understanding it is not a pool, Phil. It is open coverage. I think I explained yesterday that the press plane will land at Grand Junction two hours ahead of the President, and that the people who want to go on to Vail to cover his arrival there will leap on a bus and drive straight on. It is three hours. And then those who would rather stay behind in Grand Junction and see his arrival there can stay if they want to. We will fill up as many buses and take them right in to Vail as we can, and then you will go out to the house and cover his arrival there.

Q You are talking about getting everybody at the bottom of the slope.

MR. NESSEN: On Sunday.

Q On Sunday.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q I am just talking about coverage at the top.

MR. NESSEN: Not on the first day. There is not going to be a protective pool at the top any day, which includes Sunday.

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Q Ron, is any kind of ceremony planned for his arrival like a welcome by city officials, or anything like that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of anything, Russ, but as I say, Eric went out there this morning and I will be talking to him once he gets on the ground, and we will just relay to you, as we get it from Eric, what the plans are out there.

There is one thing I forgot to tell you about Rockefeller, incidentally. His Press Office says that he and his family are going to leave New York about 3:00 on a plane from Westchester Airport and arrive at Page Terminal at National at 3:45, and they will go from there to the Rockefeller home on Foxhall Road, and will stay there until it is time to come to the White House.

Q How about steel, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: On steel, what did you want to know?

Q Has the president decided to do anything more than leave it in the hands of the Wage-Price people?

MR. NESSEN: The question really is premature because -- I mean the process is under way now. U.S. Steel is going to come in with its written justification tomorrow, and based on what they say, and how the Wage and Price Stability Council feels about it, there could be additional Presidential actions, but we have to wait and see how they explain it, and whether the Wage and Price Stability Council -- what reaction it has to their explanation.

Q Ron, U.S. Steel maintains that most of its increases are catch-up increases. Is it true that the White House has no quarrel with catch-up increases?

MR. NESSEN: I think we really have to wait for them to send in their written justification and let the Council make that judgment, that very judgment.

Q So when you are talking about rolling back their prices, are you leaving the door open to rolling it back and below what they consider catch-up prices?

MR. NESSEN: It is something I really cannot do. The Wage and Price Stability Council has this thing under way, and they will make a ruling on what they think of the U.S. Steel explanation of it.

Q Ron, has the President sent a letter to Senator Jackson offering a compromise on the Strip Mining Bill?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any letter on the Strip Mining.

Q Has he made any other approach?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any approach. I think the matter pretty much stands where we talked about it yesterday, which is, he has announced his plan to veto the bill as it is, and the only decision there is whether a real veto or a pocket veto.

Senator Jackson's staff has sent a request in here asking that the White House try to find room for a compromise, and the compromise would be carried out by a second bill that would correct some of the deficiencies the President sees in the first bill. And the Administration is actively working on suggestions for a draft bill that might make these corrections.

I think Frank told you on Saturday that the Administration has, for a long time, believed in the need for strip mining legislation that would be balanced between the desire to protect the environment and to reclaim land, and also the need to increase coal production because of the energy problem, and the desire to reduce the reliance on oil. So I think the way it stands is that the President is anxious to achieve acceptable legislation without further delay.

I think the President's advisers would recommend that he accept the present bill, if Congress passes another bill which makes the corrections he outlined at this session.

Q Ron, was the President totally unaware of Mr. Bass's interest in strip mining when he agreed to accept the house?

MR. NESSEN: The President told me this morning -- and if you would like to quote this you may -- "The first time I knew he owned one ounce of coal was when I read it at 7:00 a.m. in the New York Times." And as Jack told some of you yesterday -- Hushen -- the President does not make environmental policy decisions based on whose house he is renting for Christmas.

Q Ron, could you tell us if the President is contemplating having a news conference before he goes to Vail, and if you can't answer that, can you rule one out?

MR. NESSEN: I just do not have anything to give you on a news conference today, Walt.

Q How about tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have anything to give you on a news conference, period.

Q Can you rule one out in Vail?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans to have one in Vail.

Q Ron, yesterday, I think, in giving us a capsule biography of Mr. Bass, you mentioned he was a geologist and that he has holdings in mineral, or in any case, extracting industries. Did no one go beyond that and find out whether he was in oil or coal or what?

MR. NESSEN: I can tell you how this biography came about. I anticipated that there would be some interest in who Dick Bass was. I talked to him on the telephone Tuesday, December 17th and asked him to tell me who he was, and this is what he gave me.

Q You did not ask him whether he was in coal or oil?

MR. NESSEN: I did not know that it really mattered. The answer is, I did not.

Q Does the President plan any actions on bills today?

MR. NESSEN: There is getting to be quite a pile of them here.

Q How many, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: No. I guess there are maybe in the area of about a half dozen that need to be thought about sooner or need to have decisions made on them soon.

Just to finish -- Helen, I do not know of any that we will be announcing today.

Q What about the Nixon tapes' bill?

MR. NESSEN: No decision, but very soon.

Q You have to act --

MR. NESSEN: -- by midnight tomorrow.

Q Is the President likely to sign the transportation bill, which permits bigger trucks on highways?

MR. NESSEN: I did not even know about that one. That is not one of the six. Is it up here, or is it still on the Hill?

Q Here.

Q They completed work yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: I have not looked into that one, but I tell you, from what I have heard here this morning, there are a lot of them and many of them are complicated. The trade bill, for instance, is 180 pages, I am told, and aside from the ones that have deadlines on them, like the Nixon tapes' bill, I expect that that is going to take up a lot of the work in his first few days out there. I would expect you will be getting a lot of announcements in Vail of bill signings or vetoes.

Q What do you think the President will do when the food aid increase bill comes back from the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: The which one?

Q The food aid increase.

MR. NESSEN: The President saw some of the material sent to him for him to make his decision on, and he asked for additional material and that is being prepared and sent to him, so the decision has slipped a little bit on that one.

Q That is food aid?

MR. NESSEN: Food aid, yes, international food aid.

Q Ron, did the Secretary of State and the Israeli Ambassador have an angry argument in the White House near midnight either last night or the night before?

MR. NESSEN: I am told there was no meeting last night between the Ambassador --

Q How about the night before?

MR. NESSEN: They had dinner at the Golda Meir Dinner and, then, I am told, the Ambassador went home and the Secretary went home and did not have any private meetings.

Q And there was none the night before either?

MR. NESSEN: I did not check the night before. I thought the story said last night.

Q Well, it did, but there was some question as to whether last night was the last night here or last night, the night before that.

MR. NESSEN: I will check. I have not heard anything to indicate they ever had this kind of meeting that the Israeli paper talked about.

Q Ron, on the strip mining bill, you did mean to say, didn't you, that the President hoped that another bill could be passed this session?

MR. NESSEN: I hope that is clear now that it is not a question of sign this one and hoping for the best next time to correct it. He would consider signing this one, or would sign this one, if the corrective bill is passed now, before Congress goes home, so he could sign both at the same time.

Q There is not considered to be any realistic chance of that is there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim. You have to check the Hill.

Q Would you anticipate there would be a realistic chance?

MR. NESSEN: The White House would like to have realistic strip mining legislation, and so, we would like it.

Q Can you give us specifics on this corrective legislation that is needed?

MR. NESSEN: I have a transcript of Zarb's briefing from Saturday. I am not an expert on strip mining, but I think he pointed out -- I think the main complaint is the ambiguity of some of the language that is open to various interpretations. He is concerned and the President is concerned that the language is ambiguous and would result in a very large number of lawsuits.

Let me start back again then and tell you the five specific objections to it, if I may.

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Number one, the changes that the White House would like made are, one, revising the scope of the citizens' suits provision so as to reduce the regulatory uncertainties, which is what I started to talk about, which could cause unnecessary production losses through extended and extensive lawsuits.

Q. Could you run through that once more?

MR. NESSEN: You were here on Saturday. I am just telling you the same thing Frank told you.

Q. To reduce what?

MR. NESSEN: To reduce the regulatory uncertainties which could otherwise cause unnecessary production losses through extended and extensive lawsuits.

The second objection is -- and I should say, the second correction the President would like would be to authorize the Secretary of Interior, to designate him as the one whose definitions would govern the interpretation of ambiguous terms in the legislation.

Q. That is the Secretary of Interior's interpretation?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, authorize him to define the ambiguous terms.

Q. The Secretary, or Frank Zarb in this case?

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MR. NESSEN: The Secretary of Interior is Rogers Morton.

Q To designate the Secretary.

MR. NESSEN: No, no. The correction the White House would like to make is to designate the Interior Secretary as the one who would make the definitions.

The third correction would be to qualify what the White House considers the unnecessarily rigid prohibition against increased siltation which -- you know what that means. It has to do with silt getting into water systems that are near the strip mining operation.

The fourth correction would be to qualify the prohibitions in the bill that have to do with alluvial valley floors and hydrology which again has to do with -- just to put it in simple language -- qualifying prohibitions dealing with rivers and other waterways that might be affected by strip mining.

Fifth, the correction that the White House would like would be to focus this -- there is a reclamation fund in the bill -- to focus the use of this fund and also to reduce the excise tax on coal as an anti-inflationary measure.

There are several other minor changes in the bill too. But if that gives you an idea, I would not go into the others, if that is all right.

Q Does the White House have someone to introduce the bill today?

MR. NESSEN: I think they are working with people on the Hill, Helen. I do not have an up-to-the-minute report on how it is coming along.

Q Did the initiative for this possible compromise come from the White House or from Senator Jackson?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that his staff got in touch and said, "Let's see if we can work out a compromise."

Q When do you expect a Cabinet appointment?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have any idea, Carroll.

Q Any more this week?

MR. NESSEN: We only have one more day, or two more days. I don't know, Helen. We will have to announce it when it comes out of the hopper.

Q When are you expecting an announcement of a replacement for Mr. Ash?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you anything on time tables, Jim. Mostly because I do not have a time table.

Q How about Levi?

MR. NESSEN: We are not announcing any Cabinet changes today.

Q Will the President then hold off any nominations until the new Congress?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in sending them up for confirmation. If he does not make them before tomorrow, I guess he will have to send them up to the new Congress. That is the only Congress we have got.

Q I am talking about making the nominations in the interim.

MR. NESSEN: I see what you mean. It is possible he could make some. They all have to go through the confirmation process, but he could make some between now and January 14.

Q Would he make any as recess appointments then and not submit them until some other action is taken?

MR. NESSEN: I see what you are getting at. No, not that I know of.

Q Don Rumsfeld yesterday did not want to go into the manner in which the President plans to use the Vice-President.

MR. NESSEN: I talked to the President this morning about that because I thought you might be interested in it and I do not think it was a question of Don not wanting to go into it. It was a question of it seemed improper to do because if you started making plans for Governor Rockefeller's role or staff you were presuming a confirmation which had not taken place.

The fact is that the President indicated this morning that now that Governor Rockefeller is confirmed and will be sworn in this evening, that he will sit down and discuss it and will indicate to Governor Rockefeller what activities the President intends for him to get into.

Q You cannot tell us anything about what his thinking is.

MR. NESSEN: Only what he said himself which is he would like him to play a role in domestic policies. There are certain things the Vice-President does by statute. I do not have those right in front of me, but you probably know what they are. For the rest of it, they have not had their talk and the President has not instructed him as to what he wants him to do.

Q Will he be coming out to Vail, Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Has the President learned anything by being Vice-President himself that he would like to pass along?

MR. NESSEN: I think that might be something they will talk about. There are no specifics.

Q Specifically, Ron, is the President considering the establishment of a new Domestic Policy Board that presumably would replace the Domestic Council in naming Vice-President Rockefeller as Chairman of that Board?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I have read that, Jim, but I have not heard it discussed in any way around here.

Q That is not a matter under consideration as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: That I am aware of, that is right.

Q Ron, have you heard discussed the possibility that a successor to Ken Cole will not be named but that Vice-President Rockefeller would assume those duties?

MR. NESSEN: I do not think Vice-President Rockefeller can assume Ken Cole's duties. Ken is the Executive Director of the Domestic Council, running it on a day-to-day basis, which is a full time job, and I do not see that as Vice-President Rockefeller's job.

Q Is the President speaking at the inaugural?

MR. NESSEN: No, not that I know of.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 1:05 P.M. EST) #106