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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:07 A.M. EDT

MARCH 10, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I wanted to get started early today because we have the swearing-in of Carla Hills as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the East Room at noon, open for full press coverage.

As you know, Mrs. Hills was nominated to be HUD Secretary on February 13, and she was confirmed by the Senate on the 5th of March. She will be the fourth Secretary of HUD. The first was Robert Weaver, followed by George Romney, and then Jim Lynn.

The oath will be administered by Mr. Justice White. The President will have some remarks, the text of which I think we have just given you. Also, Mrs. Hills will have some remarks. We will have a verbatim transcript of what the President says later.

This is ladies' day at the White House, I guess, because at 1 o'clock the President is meeting Miss America, Shirley Cothran, of Denton, Texas. Well, maybe not exactly ladies' day because Congressman Ray Roberts of Texas will be there. He represents Denton, Texas, and the Mayor of Denton, Texas, Joseph A. Bradway, will be there. Obviously, we will have pictures of that if anyone wants one.

At 2 o'clock the President will meet with Chief Justice Burger, Senators Scott and Mansfield, Speaker Albert, and Congressmen Rhodes and O'Neill.

The Chief Justice requested this meeting. It will be in the Cabinet Room, and I think you are probably familiar with the Chief Justice's views on the judicial pay scale. That is the subject of the meeting.

Q Is that the only subject of the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, as far as I know.

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Q Ron, what are the President's views on that? Will you tell us what they are?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with them either, and I think they will come out at this meeting today.

You also have a letter signed by the President in which he pays tribute to Black Press Week, which is being observed from March 10 to 16, and you should have copies of that letter.

There are two resignations of judges today -- Edwin A. Robinson, the Chief Judge of the Northern District of Illinois, who is retiring; and E. Avery Crary, the District Judge for the Central District of California.

We also have with us today a number of members of the 1974-1975 class of White House Fellows, who are guests here at the briefing today, and they want to observe the briefing. I am going to talk with them afterwards a little bit about how the Press Office works.

The fellows were selected from 1400 applicants to serve as special assistants to members of the Cabinet and the President's staff. We do have an office here that deals with the White House Fellows program, and if you want any further information, we can provide it for you.

That looks like all my announcements for today.

Q How many fellows are there, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: There are 15 White House fellows altogether.

Q Are there any girls among the fellows?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, in his report from Mr. Colby, was the President informed in that report or at any other time by Mr. Colby or other CIA officials that the late Senator Robert Kennedy had told two associates that he had vetoed or been able to veto a plan -- this question takes a long time to ask because it is a complicated thing -- the CIA plan to contract with the Mafia to assassinate Prime Minister Castro?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to say anything about that, Jim.

Q Will we ever find out anything about that, or the previous story about the CIA assassination allegations which were asked about last week; that is, is the White House ever going to have anything to say about those stories?

MR. NESSEN: Right now, I am not going to say anything about it, Walt.

Q Last week you said a number of things. Why are you not going to say anything about it?

MR. NESSEN: I can't.

Q Does the White House feel that if this sort of thing happened, the American people do deserve to know about it sooner or later?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to say anything about it, Steve.

Q Did the President have a meeting last week with newspapermen or executives from one newspaper, discussing any part of the CIA story that we are asking about? I am asking only whether he held such a meeting.

MR. NESSEN: He did not have such a meeting last week.

Q Did he have a meeting a week before, or at any time?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about the subject.

Q I am not asking contents, Ron. I am asking whether such a meeting was held.

MR. NESSEN: The question was?

Q Did the President discuss any part of Colby's CIA with the group of newspaper people from one newspaper?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about it.

Q Do you expect the Rockefeller committee's final report will cover the allegations which are being raised with the press at this meeting here today?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I just don't have any way of knowing that. You will have to talk to the people on the Commission.

Q Ron, we started asking I think it was in Vail, which makes it quite a while ago, whether or not all or any part of Colby's report to the President was ever going to be made public. As a matter of fact, we asked it of the President, as I recall.

My perception of his answer was that at some point it was felt that some portion of the Colby report would be made public. Have you anything to tell us now on it after the passage of many weeks?

MR. NESSEN: As I understand the present status of it, the Colby report has been turned over to the Rockefeller Commission and it is expected that one of the recommendations of the Rockefeller Commission would be whether to make public all or portions of the Colby report.

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Q Has the President given the Rockefeller Commission a report on any verbal exchanges that he had with Mr. Colby that were beyond the written document, or will he?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, Steve.

Q Why is it going to be a Rockefeller Commission decision, Ron, when the President indicated -- I think at least by inference -- or certainly, the sum total of what he said was that was a Presidential decision he would make and at some point, he thought probably it would be put out as his decision.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I didn't say it was a Rockefeller Commission decision. I said it was expected to be one of the recommendations. Obviously, the President will make the decision. The report will be to him.

Q Ron, is the President concerned about the reports, without commenting on the accuracy of the reports, on the widespread reports in the press and elsewhere that the CIA may have been involved in plots to assassinate foreign leaders? Has he expressed any concern about that, as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about that subject, Jim.

Q The President, himself, referred to the assassination reports in a way that did not involve a denial at the press conference the other day. He said that the reports referred to events that might have taken place in the 1960s.

In view of the fact that the President is practically speaking, acknowledging, that they may have taken place, why can't you go beyond what you are giving us now?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't, and won't, Mort.

Q Can you explain to us why you won't?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about that subject.

Q Ron, could we get on another topic here since you are not going to answer anything on this?

When is the White House going to announce the Commodity Futures Trading Commission nominees?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry?

Q The Commodity Futures Trading Commission nominees. It is a regulatory commission like the SEC. They are supposed to be in full effect by April 21. That means Senate confirmation. They have to have a number of people registered and a number of other things. And here, we don't have the nominees at all. When are we going to hear anything?

MR. NESSEN: In the near future.

Q At the same time, since it has taken so long to get these nominees out, is the White House going to ask Congress for a delay on when this commission goes into effect?

MR. NESSEN: I would think if the names were up in short order, there would not need to be any delay.

Q All right. Now, we have had tentatively five names that were not confirmed that have been given out and nobody denied it. At the same time, we have heard that Bob Price, of Texas, has now been dropped from that list and that you all are searching for another person and that is why it is taking so long. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: We never talk about personnel announcements until they are made and sent to the Hill.

Q Ron, on another subject, is the President supportive of John Rhodes' plan to put forward still another energy plan?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to John Rhodes' office just before coming out here and their plan, as they explain it, is not, as the Star seemed to indicate, to put up a plan that would put some distance between them and the President, but rather, to put up a plan that would put some distance between them and the Democrats.

Congressman Rhodes' office indicates that they expect that the ideas that Congressional Republicans come up with will be very close to the President's ideas. He has been in touch with the White House. He has been working on this for about six weeks, I understand, and that is about all I know about it.

Q Why does he not just support the President's plan? Did you ask him that?

MR. NESSEN: He has, Peter.

Q Why is he coming up with his own proposal?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, to show that Congressional Republicans have some ideas that are close to, or the same as, the President's.

Q Won't this further delay the President's energy package getting through Congress?

MR. NESSEN: Well, that really is a matter that you need to talk to Congressman Rhodes about. The White House knew about it. I talked to Rhodes' office, and that is their motive in doing this.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to the fact that one of his Republican Congressional leaders feels the need to come up with his own plan?

MR. NESSEN: His own plan was distinctive from the Democrats' plan, Gaylord.

Q Well, it is also distinctive from the President's plan.

MR. NESSEN: How do you know that?

Q If it is the same as the President's, why is it necessary for him to come up with another plan?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, you need to talk to him about that.

Q We are asking you.

MR. NESSEN: The President has no reaction other than the fact that the White House has known for some time that Congressman Rhodes was doing this. He has generally supported the President. He certainly did on the tax cuts and on the energy maneuvering that has gone on, so far.

Q Does the President not think that this will delay his own package?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen anything specific from Congressman Rhodes. It is going to take him some time to put his ideas together, and his office indicated that his plan would be close to, or exactly like, the President's.

Q Is he dragging his feet, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: On what?

Q Waiting for Congressman Rhodes' plan to take the final form.

MR. NESSEN: On the energy plan?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The negotiations have already begun on the energy proposals.

Q Ron, if it is so close to the President's, why did he have to work six weeks on it?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, these are questions you need to ask Congressman Rhodes.

Q No, we are asking you. We want to know what the President's reaction is. We don't even want to know your reaction, basically, because you said you called him. Did the President talk to him?

MR. NESSEN: I said, the White House has known about this, Helen, since he began.

Q Who is the White House? The President has known and he has talked to him?

MR. NESSEN: Congressman Rhodes says he has talked to the President.

Q Did the White House encourage Congressman Rhodes to mount his own plan or did they discourage it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it was either one of those, Mort.

Q Does the White House see this as a possible route to compromise with the Democrats, something in between?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, negotiations have already begun with the Democrats.

Q Could you tell us a little about those negotiations -- when they began, who is carrying them on?

MR. NESSEN: Members of Frank Zarb's staff and members of Al Ullman's staff, I guess, began meeting toward the end of last week. I think Frank and also Chairman Ullman have met, themselves.

Q Is the President distressed that we are now two months into the session and the Republicans still have not been able to come up with a plan?

MR. NESSEN: Les?

Q Ron, to go to another matter --

Q Excuse me, I didn't hear your answer, Ron.



Q It is a legitimate question. He has been distressed that the Democrats have not had a plan. Is he distressed that it has taken the Republicans this long to come up with an energy package?

MR. NESSEN: There is no indication that Congressman Rhodes is going to put out an energy program as a rival to the President's. He has supported the President's energy and tax cut programs.

Q Ron, about Congressman Ullman's staff meeting with Frank Zarb's staff -- as I understand that, the Zarb staff is actually providing technical advice on things that the Congressional staffers might be a little weak on, so that they are actually sitting down and working together to hammer out an acceptable bill to both sides.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what stage they have reached, but they are talking about the -- well, for one thing, they are designating or identifying the areas of agreement and the areas that need to be negotiated. They are providing the kind of technical guidance that you are talking about and which I talked about awhile back when I said that Congress would go through the same process that the President has gone through. Frank's office is helping with that in terms of basic material.

Q Ron, does the President feel that Governor Reagan is wrong in his contention that American citizens on the high seas in tuna boats are entitled to protection of the United States Navy?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar --

Q It was on page one of the Post this morning. Millions of dollars we have been paying as sort of a ransom because the Equadoreans claim 200 miles out. You didn't see that story?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see Governor Reagan's involvement in the story.

Q Governor Reagan has stated that American tuna boat fishermen -- they confiscated 132 of these boats. We are paying them economic and military aid and they continue confiscating these things. We pay ransom.

Now, he has suggested that American citizens on the high seas are entitled to protection of the United States Navy. What does the President feel?

MR. NESSEN: I will need to check on that, Les.

Q Would you check, too, whether the Equadorean Navy boats that are capturing these smaller tuna boats were given to Equador as a gift by our Navy?

MR. NESSEN: I will check on that.

Q And they are manned by Saudi Arabians. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is right. (Laughter)

Q Can you tell me, Mr. Nessen, whether or not Mr. Burger also arranged for the presence of the leaders of Congress at that meeting today?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the purpose of Chief Justice Burger requesting the meeting was to discuss his views on the need for judicial pay raises, and those pay raises obviously have to be approved by Congress. That accounts for the presence of the Congressional leaders.

Q Did he invite them or did the President invite them?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see if I have a paper on that. I don't think I have a paper on that meeting. We will check, though.

Q Ron, on that same subject, you say that you don't know what the President's attitude is toward pay increases for the Federal judiciary, but the President, sometime ago, unsuccessfully asked Congress to delay a pay increase for Federal employees or Federal pay increase. Could we infer from that that his reaction to the pay increase or proposed pay increase for the Federal judiciary would be negative or does he believe that the Federal judiciary falls in a different category than the Executive Branch bureaucracy, and military?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think it would be better since he is having this meeting shortly, Jim, to wait and see what his attitude is toward judicial pay raises.

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Q Can you tell me, Mr. Nessen, whether this is the first time the Chief Justice has been at the White House since Mr. Ford became the President?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not.

Q On how many occasions has he been here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a complete list, but I know at least one or two.

Q Is he a regular visitor?

MR. NESSEN: I would not call him a regular visitor.

Q Is he a frequent visitor?

MR. NESSEN: I would not call him a frequent visitor.

Q The one time that you know of that he was here since the President has been in office, was that announced at that time?

MR. NESSEN: I believe it was.

Q Are you talking about social visits?

MR. NESSEN: We are not talking about social visits, are we? We are talking about business visits?

Q Yes.

Q Ron, this morning when you talked to the President, did the CIA matter come up in any manner, shape or form?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The view that you are expressing to us here that you will not comment on any meeting that he has held or any discussions of the Colby report, all of this, the President agrees with your position?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather say that I agree with his position.

Q Same thing. That is his position?

Q Sorry, Ron. What specifically came up? The report in today's New York Times?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about it.

Q You suggest it.

MR. NESSEN: I said among the other things I talked about with the President were CIA matters.

Q It appears fairly clear that you are acting on direct orders of the President not to discuss any aspect of this matter, Ron. Would you go so far as to say that?

MR. NESSEN: I would not reach that conclusion, Jim.

Q You say, however, that you are agreeing with his position rather than him agreeing with yours?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I am just not going to discuss the reports of the CIA and assassination.

Q I am not asking about that. I am asking about instructions, without going into the substance of these reports in any way. It appears clear that you are operating under instructions from the President here. Can you say yes or no to that simple question?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q No you won't comment or no --

MR. NESSEN: My role in life is to reflect what the President feels about everything you ask me. The Press Secretary's -- I think I have said this before -- own personal views on matters are irrelevant. Everything I say here, hopefully, is an accurate reflection of what the President feels concerning the issues that you ask me about.

Q Then why do you say no to Jim's question, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I said that I just did not want to answer the question of -- had I received a direct order this morning to take this approach?

Q You cannot have it both ways. You said first that you reflect the President's views, and then you say that you don't want to answer the question, the question specifically being, did the President tell you not to discuss it? We can only infer from that that the President is saying, "Don't discuss it."

Q You have not been fired, have you, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: When I just started smoking a pipe? (Laughter)

Q Does the President think it is a legitimate point of inquiry for the Hill and also the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, Helen.

Q Political assassinations or intent to do so--does the President think this is the legitimate point for the Rockefeller Commission to look into?

MR. NESSEN: The Rockefeller Commission, as I understand its mandate, is to look into alleged domestic spying by the CIA.

Q Ron, that would exclude any assassination probes overseas then. Are you saying the Rockefeller Commission will not look into these reports?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying that their charter is to deal with allegations of domestic spying.

Q Has the President asked Senator Church to put some of his hearings on a secret basis, on a closed basis, by any chance?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard that.

Q I was wondering whether the President has asked that in view of the fact that this is likely to come up in the Congressional hearing?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware. I am not aware of any Presidential request to Senator Church along those lines.

Q Did you make the decision on your own that regardless of what questions were asked out here today about the political assassinations by the CIA that you were not going to answer them? Was that your decision?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I am not going to talk about it.

Q Ron, you seem to be saying that the Rockefeller Commission is not chartered to look into the allegations of the political assassinations. Is there anybody in the government looking into this?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know that Senator Church's committee has a much broader focus to its investigation.

Q Is that the only forum for an investigation into this?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, but I would like to check it.

Q Ron, can I put the question another way to get more precise about it? Is the Rockefeller Commission investigation confined solely to the domestic activities of the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: I hesitate to say a flat yes -- because that will produce a whole spate of stories saying that the President has forbidden them to look into allegations.

Peter, the charter of that Commission has been out on the public record for two or two and a half months.

Q As I understand it, it relates to domestic activities, and I am simply asking you to be more precise about it.

MR. NESSEN: That is the way the charter reads.

Q Ron, the President set that charter, did he not?

MR. NESSEN: It is his Commission, so he did.

Q He could change it if he wanted to, could he not?

MR. NESSEN: I assume he could.

Q The third question is, does he plan to broaden the charter of the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, we asked several times for the memo the President sent out in connection with the Arab boycotts, and we have still not gotten it. Can you explain why there is so much delay?

MR. NESSEN: Why is there so much delay?

MR. HUSHEN: We have been focusing on other things.

Q Have you been waiting for that longstanding investigation of the Department of Defense? Is that the reason for the delay, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not, Les.

Q Any results from the Department of Defense insofar as that investigation of why we allow the Saudis to impose religious segregation on our troops in Saudi Arabia?

MR. NESSEN: Did you say, "Are there any results of the investigation yet?"

Q I just wondered. Have you heard any?

MR. NESSEN: I think the first person who would get the results, of course, would be the Defense Secretary.

Q I thought he was doing it and would give it to the President.

MR. NESSEN: It has not come here yet that I am aware of.

Q On the CIA thing, as I remember, when Senator Church came out, the Senator said that the President reserved the right for himself to review on a case-by-case basis all requests for information for the Senate investigation of the intelligence community.

Now, that means that the President has the right to refuse any information, and he is holding that right for himself on any investigation about allegations of political spying.

If we take you at your word on the limits of the scope of the Rockefeller investigation, what you are telling us is that it is entirely possible that there will be no official investigation of the allegations of political assassination.

MR. NESSEN: That is a big leap, Walt. I don't exactly understand.

Q We have already agreed that the charter for the Rockefeller Commission limits that investigation to domestic spying, which would exclude the political assassinations. The President has reserved the right to exert Executive privilege on any request for --

MR. NESSEN: Whoa, whoa. That is where you made the leap. I don't understand that part of it.

Q It seems to me when Senator Church came out and talked to us outside after meeting with the President that day with Senator Tower, Senator Church said that the President would review all requests for information from that committee on a case-by-case basis. What you are telling us is that the President is in a position to block any investigation whatsoever of the political assassinations. That is the case as it stands now. Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to make that assessment yourself, Walt.

Q Let me ask you a question. All past allegations beside the point, does the Administration have a position on what the role of the Central Intelligence Agency should be as to participation in assassination plots and things of that type? Has the President ever said how he views that sort of thing and how the CIA should handle it?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think I am going to talk about that, Bob.

Q In other words, what I am asking you, does the President think it is all right for the CIA to go out and involve itself in assassination plots?

MR. NESSEN: Do you want a yes or no?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to talk about it.

Q You won't comment on the fact?

Q That has the effect of leaving open the possibility that the President supports the idea of the CIA going around looking for alternates to foreign leaders.

Q I am not asking you about any case that has already gone before or anything like that. I am just asking you how the President feels.

Q I am serious about that. You are leaving open the possibility.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to talk about the subject.

Q Ron, isn't it a fact that the White House, and maybe the President himself, has said that the policy of this Administration is such that -- whether or not it went on in the past -- it is not now the policy of this Administration to allow that?

MR. NESSEN: What was the last thing the President said about that?

Let me check what his public words are on that. I do remember something like that.



Q Ron, Don Rumsfeld was asked about that yesterday, and he seemed to indicate that the policy now was that we didn't do things like that. Isn't that your impression?

MR. NESSEN: I do recall the President saying something publicly about this, and we will check and find out what it is.

Q Wait. Don Rumsfeld is not the spokesman of the White House. You are, as I understand it.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Why is it not possible for you to give us a statement when Don Rumsfeld feels free to?

MR. NESSEN: What was his statement yesterday?

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Q On "Meet the Press" he was asked about this, and he very strongly indicated -- I can't quote his exact words -- that assassinations are no longer the policy of the United States Government, of this Administration.

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Yes or no.

Q In other words, is this assassination policy now inoperative?

MR. NESSEN: You know, I want to back up one step and give you my sort of normal caution about beginning to talk so freely and naturally about the political assassinations as if that were an established fact.

Beyond that, let me find what the President's view, on the reported statement about this subject was because I do recall he had one. I will get it for you, hopefully, before this briefing is over.

Q Do you have any basis for believing the story in The New York Times?

MR. NESSEN: Which one?

Q The one about the assassination plot against Mr. Castro.

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to talk about it.

Q Ron, I want to go back to Walt Rodgers' question and try somehow to turn it around. Can you, as the spokesman for the President of the United States, tell us and tell the American people whether, in your opinion, there is or is not going to be an investigation by someone, either in the Executive or Legislative Branches, of these reports that the CIA was connected to or had some connection with political assassinations?

MR. NESSEN: Well, there certainly will be an opportunity for the Church investigation to look into that if they wish. The charter of the Rockefeller Commission is limited to allegations of domestic spying, and beyond that, at the moment, I don't know of any other investigations.

Q Does the President have the charter of the Rockefeller Commission under any kind of review, informal or otherwise?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Will the President cooperate with this facet of the Church investigation?

MR. NESSEN: He told Senator Church that he would cooperate to the maximum extent.

Q Yes, but he also said that bit about the individual basis.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Case-by-case.

MR. NESSEN: Senator Church has not requested officially any information yet, so I think you really need to wait and see what he requests.

Q Ron, on the basis of what you have been saying, you are reluctant to talk about this. Would the maximum extent include information about political assassinations in the past?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as the President said the other night in answer to Jim's question, when asked very much the same thing, he pointed out that the Congressional investigation would be an investigation of the CIA and other intelligence agencies -- activities both overt and covert -- going back to the inception of the CIA. So, he clearly has indicated that he anticipates that the Church investigation would get into some of these areas.

Q Did he give any specific assurance there that he would cooperate on that?

MR. NESSEN: He told Senator Church in their first exploratory meeting the other day that he would cooperate to the maximum extent.

Q Did the Colby report ever take anything outside the domestic area, and did the President ever get an oral report, or addendum?

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

Q So far as you know, Ron, are you saying that to your knowledge this would not preclude information on past political assassinations? Maximum extent?

MR. NESSEN: You mean the Church --

Q The President's assurance to Church that he would cooperate to the maximum extent -- does this embrace or not embrace the subject of past potential political assassinations?

MR. NESSEN: I think the subjects for the Church Committee to investigate are up to the Church Committee. If they request --

Q He said he would cooperate to get the information.

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Senator Church has indicated that he is getting into this. He told us that outside, there is no question about that.

MR. NESSEN: Then he obviously may request information; and if that is the case, the President -- as he told Senator Church the other day -- will consider it on a case-by-case basis.

Q Ron, do all Church requests about the CIA have to come through the White House? Can he go directly to the CIA with questions?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure that all of the information he wants is not -- well, you really need to ask Senator Church what he wants. He has not said what he wants at this point.

Q Was there any kind of an arrangement set up at that meeting whereby any request that Senator Church had about the activities of the CIA would be funneled through the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No, not that I am aware of. The discussion was a general one in which he sort of laid out his investigation, and the President offered cooperation. They talked in general terms about information.

The President said he would handle it on a case-by-case basis, and there was no official request at that point for any information.

Q Ron, to follow up Mort's first suggestion or observation, we have a situation here where Mr. Rumsfeld goes on national television to say that assassination is no longer the policy of the U.S. Government, and yet, this morning you start off and refuse to even discuss the subject.

Now, what do we conclude -- that Mr. Rumsfeld has been too outspoken or that you are too hesitant?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I feel this is an area, Les, and I am sure you would agree, that I would want to be very sure of what the President's views are, and at the moment, I have not had an opportunity --

Q Rumsfeld was, and you are not, is that what you mean, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would like to be sure of the President's views before I attempt to give them to you.

Q I see.

Q Ron, there have been a great many questions raised here today and in past briefings. Would it be possible for you to ascertain the President's views in a concrete and detailed way and report them back to us with specific reference to (1) the question of whether assassinations are or are not the policy of the government and (2) whether or not the President wishes and will permit the Church Committee to investigate these assassination reports?

MR. NESSEN: I will explore those two.

Q I would like to add a third point to what Jim just asked. We would like to get the general feeling of the President about these stories, whether or not he wants to comment on them, confirm them or deny them or whatever -- what his reaction to these stories is.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

Q Ron, can I pursue the matter of the Church investigation? You say that decisions are going to be handled on a case-by-case basis. Is there some machinery set up by the government for handling the Church request, and does Senator Church know where to address those requests to on the basis of his meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to ask Senator Church.

Q Is there any machinery in the government for handling Senator Church's request?

MR. NESSEN: Any special machinery set up for this? Not that I know of.

MORE

Q Who is he liaisoning with? I mean he has something on his mind. Who does he call up here?

MR. NESSEN: I will find out. I suspect -- well, I will find out.

Q Ron, the second thing, is Vice President Rockefeller acting in any advisory capacity to the President on the subject of the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: Beyond --

Q He is an investigator on domestic activities of the CIA. Is the President consulting with Rockefeller as to any phase of his, the President's oversight of the CIA or the CIA issue?

MR. NESSEN: Did Rockefeller resign from the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board?

MR. HUSHEN: Yes. You have to be a civilian.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he is, Mort, beyond his investigation of allegations of domestic spying.

Q One last question. Has the President discussed with the Vice President the subject of the Church inquiry and how the Church inquiry should be handled by the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Could you check that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, when you first wanted to get the President's past remarks was in relationship to whether or not that was our policy now and I don't believe the remark you read dealt with that question.

MR. NESSEN: No, it does not. We need to delve back. I mean the simplest way would be for me to talk to him about that specifically.

Q I mean I am just really amazed that you are not aware of what the Administration policy is on assassination of foreign political leaders. I mean is that what you want to leave us with here, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I would think, Bob, that you would prefer an informed comment on this as opposed to guessing at it.

Q I would.

MR. NESSEN: You can certainly take Don Rumsfeld's remarks on television yesterday as being authoritative. He is Assistant to the President.

Q Well, I mean I am just surprised that they are authoritative, that they were not more widely distributed within the Administration.

Q Would you give us Rumsfeld's statements? Do you have them there?

MR. NESSEN: For those of you who may have missed Don on television yesterday, Mr. Lisagor asked, "Should the CIA or any American agency be involved in assassination plans involving foreign leaders?" To which Mr. Rumsfeld replied: "I have been involved in the Ford Administration for about five months. It is certainly my impression that this President feels that that is not happening during his presidency and his intention is that it not happen during his presidency."

Q Will you please tell us approximately when you will give us a readout on these unanswered questions?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to be able to set a time, Walt, until I have had a chance to figure how many there are and how much digging it will take to get the answers.

I will say that I spent most of my morning today before this briefing in anticipation of a good number of Cambodian questions.

Q Let's have it.

MR. NESSEN: The press who need to cover Carla Hills' swearing in I guess are a little late in leaving.

I do have the cables here which Senator Humphry and so forth saw and I think we probably ought to -- I mean if there is any interest, we can go into that.

Q There is indeed.

Q Ron, could you release those cables for us?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Peter; they are confidential.

Q They are confidential?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we could try it tomorrow, maybe.

THE PRESS: Thank you.