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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:57 A.M. EDT

MARCH 25, 1975

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President met this morning with a delegation headed by the South Vietnamese Ambassador, Tran Kim Phuong, and six South Vietnamese members of Parliament, and the South Vietnamese labor leader, Truong Quoc Buu.

The parliamentarians are here for an official visit to tell Congress of South Vietnam's need for assistance. Mr. Buu is in the United States as a guest of the AFL-CIO, which requested that the President see him.

The President said he was deeply disturbed by the reports of the new fighting in South Vietnam. He asked the Ambassador and the parliamentarians to take back to President Thieu, and the Vietnamese people, a message of the President's respect and admiration for the courage and determination they are showing in their fight against the North Vietnamese offensive.

The President explained that he had already asked for further assistance from Congress for South Vietnam, and he told them that he would push very hard to persuade Congress to approve those funds. He also told them that the United States condemns the attacks being made by North Vietnam and that the United States will continue its efforts to make clear to the rest of the world our feeling that North Vietnam is violating the Paris accords.

He said that he realized that morale in South Vietnam had suffered because of the attacks, and he said that for that reason he wanted his message to go back and that he would make a maximum effort to obtain assistance from Congress, which South Vietnam needs desperately.

The President told the delegates from South Vietnam and the Ambassador that he is sending General Fred C. Weyand to South Vietnam. General Weyand will leave tomorrow. The purpose of this trip is to assess the military situation, to report his findings and to make recommendations on further help that might be needed for South Vietnam.

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Q Will he report directly to the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he will.

The President feels that General Weyand has good relations with President Thieu, with the South Vietnamese military and with the South Vietnamese people. As some of you know, General Weyand has been in South Vietnam before as a division commander, commander of II Field Forces, and he was Abrams' deputy and commander of American forces in Vietnam.

The President wants him to convey to South Vietnam the President's strong support and to tell the people that he is making an all-out effort to persuade Congress to supply money for additional military equipment.

Q Did General Weyand meet with the President this morning? Did you say that?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't say that, but General Weyand was here this morning.

Q When is he leaving?

MR. NESSEN: He will be leaving tomorrow.

Q Did he meet with the President this morning, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He was in the building, and he did see the President, that is right.

Q Why was Ambassador Martin here today?

MR. NESSEN: I mentioned yesterday, John, that the Ambassador was in this country for treatment of a minor medical ailment, and he will be going back to South Vietnam tomorrow, along with the General.

Q Was there any kind of a crisis meeting here on Vietnam on which these decisions were based?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't say it was a crisis meeting, Helen.

Q Well, NSC.

MR. NESSEN: There has been no NSC meeting.

Q Ron, did Ambassador Martin meet with the President this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he did.

Q Why were those not announced?

MR. NESSEN: I did not know about them yesterday when we put out the schedule.

Q Who else was in that meeting with Weyand, Martin and the President?

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Q When you say recommendations for further help, do you mean help over and above the requested \$300 million?

MR. NESSEN: I said he will make any recommendations for possible further help, if it is needed. Obviously, we don't know what his recommendations will be.

Q Possibly over and above the \$300 million?

MR. NESSEN: It isn't possible to say, Ralph, because we don't know what he is going to recommend.

Q Why was it felt necessary to send General Weyand back when only ten days ago or two weeks ago the Joint Chiefs sent a top general to make a survey?

MR. NESSEN: I believe you are talking about General Cleland. General Cleland, if I am not mistaken, made his assessment in Cambodia and not in South Vietnam.

The meeting that you are talking about with the President included Weyand, Ambassador Martin, Secretary Kissinger and General Scowcroft.

Q Will General Weyand serve in any advisory capacity in terms of offering the tactical advice to the South Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: No, certainly not.

Q How long did that meeting last?

MR. NESSEN: It lasted 25 minutes.

Q How long will the General be there?

MR. NESSEN: He is expected to return the middle or end of next week.

Q Will this lead to an increase in the President's request?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, he is coming back with recommendations. I don't know what the recommendations will be.

Q Would we be wrong to read anything into Ambassador Martin's presence and the statement here at the White House in an attempt to interpret it as a diplomatic illness?

MR. NESSEN: No, I know what the illness was, and it was not diplomatic. It was physical.

Q Is he feeling any better?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did he come back primarily for that medical reason?

MR. NESSEN: He came back entirely for the medical reason.

Q How long has he been in the country?

MR. NESSEN: I think a couple of days.

Q A couple of days?

MR. NESSEN: Somewhere between a couple of days and a week, I would say.

Q Why can't you tell us what it is?

MR. NESSEN: He had an abscessed tooth.

Q Don't we have any dental people in Saigon, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: At 12:30 the President will meet with representatives of the Sister Cities International, a private organization which sponsors the Association of American Cities with foreign communities, right now reaching 70 foreign countries.

The Department of State supplies this organization with grant funds. The President is Honorary Chairman of the Sister Cities International. He has been since January.

The purpose of this meeting is to commemorate the Association of the 500th American city, which is Savannah -- for those of you having newspapers in that area -- with the Sister Cities program. The name of the Sister City for Savannah is Patras, Greece.

I think we are going to have some pictures of that, if you want them. Bill Roberts will meet you over here in about ten minutes or so to take you in for pictures of that meeting.

In the way of personnel announcements today, we have in the Office of Congressional Relations here at the White House -- that office is now completing its staffing -- three people being added to the office. All of you will get biographies of these people after the briefing.

The three people are Charles Leppert, who will be the Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs with the House. He has been serving as a consultant in that same general area since January 1. Also, is Douglas P. Bennett, who will serve as Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs with the House of Representatives. He has been a consultant since January 5, and Robert K. Wolthuis, who will serve as Staff Assistant to Max Friedersdorf. He has been a consultant in that area since January 1.

We are also putting out today a memorandum from the President to the heads of the Executive departments and agencies advocating employment and full utilization of handicapped persons in the staffing of the Federal service.

The President is announcing that he will meet with President Kenneth D. Kaunda of Zambia on Saturday, April 19. That evening the President will give a black tie dinner at the White House in honor of the President and Mrs. Kaunda. The President and Mrs. Kaunda will be in Washington from April 18 to 21. The President is looking forward to meeting with the President and exchanging views on matters of mutual interests.

Q Is this an official visit?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Could I ask a question on that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q There have been some reports that the President may go to the Patriot's Day ceremonies on the 19th of April in Boston.

MR. NESSEN: Is that the old North Church? It is not on Saturday the 19th.

Q What is the status of this visit?

MR. NESSEN: It is an official visit.

I don't have anything further. I think we passed out earlier this morning a statement by the President expressing his sorrow at the death of King Faisal. Some of you should have that.

Q Have you decided who will be the official representative of the United States at the funeral?

MR. NESSEN: We are waiting now for information from the Saudi Embassy on what the funeral arrangements are in keeping with the religious customs of the Saudis. Pending any word on what the funeral arrangements are, the President is contemplating sending a high-ranking official to Saudi Arabia to extend to the country and the people and to the King's successor the condolences of the United States. I don't have anything further on that.

Q Ron, it was reported on UPI this morning that the President heard this news on radio, not TV. Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that the President received a phone call from Dr. Kissinger at about the same time he heard it on the radio.

Q Do you know what radio station was involved? Was it an all news station?

MR. NESSEN: And if so, which one?

Q I didn't ask that.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

Q Has the President ruled out himself going? He would not go himself?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any discussion of that .

Q What is the status of the President's off-the-record plans to go to Palm Springs Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, we have not announced any trip to Palm Springs officially. I guess some people may have picked up word of the possibility.

The fact is, the President is reconsidering going to Palm Springs and is weighing a number of other alternatives for that period.

Q What are they?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know exactly what the possibilities are. Staying in Washington is certainly one of them.

I want you to know that this reconsideration is brought on primarily because of the uncertain status of the tax cut bill.

Q Are you on the record or off the record?

MR. NESSEN: I am on the record. I am always on the record at the briefing.

Q The wires are reporting the President may ask for a special session.

Q Let him finish.

MR. NESSEN: I was saying that this was brought on primarily by the uncertain status of the tax bill. From what I see in the papers, they didn't make very much, if any, headway yesterday. Of course, there is the possibility he would have to veto it. In that case, he would certainly want to be here to push through a tax cut if he had to veto this one.

Q Would that mean a special session?

MR. NESSEN: I am not clear on what the parliamentary technique of doing that is. Somebody asked me yesterday, incidentally, whether any President had ever vetoed a tax bill. We have only been able to do some quick research on this, but Harry Truman vetoed (Laughter) -- remember him? The old Harry Truman precedents.

He did veto three tax bills that would have decreased income taxes. One on June 16, 1947; another on July 18, 1947; and a third one on April 2, 1948.

I think it is interesting to note the language he used.

Q I think we can skip that. Why don't we go on?

Q I would like to hear it.

Q Was any overridden?

Q Ron, since you haven't announced on the record the President is going, how do we use this information?

MR. NESSEN: You could say he is reconsidering his consideration of going to Palm Springs.

Q This has nothing to do with the Middle East or South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Primarily, it has to do with this feeling that he wants to stay here until a tax bill is passed.

Q When you say several alternatives, is he considering a trip abroad or anything in any kind of other realm?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, if there is a veto and he wants immediate renewed action, that would lead to a special session, would it not?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know the parliamentary situation that well, Ralph. But my understanding was that Congress had always intended to be on this 3-day rule anyhow, which is not, in effect, a real adjournment or recess.

Q Has the President been in personal contact with Ullman and Long?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he has. Since when?

Q Since the conference started yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: You mean seeing them in person?

Q Or talking to them on the phone, working out the compromise?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think he has been directly involved with them.

Q Ron, why might the President have to veto the bill?

MR. NESSEN: As I mentioned yesterday, because it -- at least in the Senate version and to some extent in the House version -- has provisions in it which he feels are ill-advised and do not belong in this bill which was intended, when he recommended it more than two months ago, to be a quick and simple tax cut to fight the recession. It is no longer, with all these amendments on it, that kind of bill.

Q Such as which amendment?

MR. NESSEN: Do we have to go through all that again?

Q Did you go through it yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: As I said before, basically he is opposed to all amendments.

Q Will he veto a bill with any amendments on it?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see what comes up here before he makes that decision.

Q Which are the worst ones?

MR. NESSEN: He is opposed to all of them.

Q I understand, Ron, but in the real world, you are not suggesting he is going to veto it because it has one amendment that changes the tax credit on insulating homes, are you?

MR. NESSEN: He is opposed to all amendments on this bill because it changes the purpose of the bill. The amendments were not considered carefully. Many of them were voted on in the middle of the night without hearings, and so forth.

Q Is the amendment on the size, then?

MR. NESSEN: He said, himself, that what he feels is necessary is a bill in the area of \$16 billion, \$19 billion, or \$20 billion.

Q I thought you were going to tell us about the Truman bill.

MR. NESSEN: The Truman veto message of his June 16, 1947 income tax reduction said, "The right kind of tax reduction at the right time is an objective to which I am deeply committed" --

Do you really want this?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: -- "but I have reached the conclusion that this bill represents the wrong kind of tax reduction at the wrong time. It offers dubious, ill-appointed, and risky benefits at the expense of a sound tax policy and is, from the standpoint of government finances, unsafe," and so forth.

Q Ron, I hate to bring this up, but I checked yesterday after I asked you about that and got the same quotes. He also went on to explain that it didn't give enough relief to low income people and too much to high income brackets. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is Charlie Ross' problem.

Q No, it is your yours, being as you used the --

MR. NESSEN: You asked me a question and I dug it up.

Q Does the President feel the quote is applicable to this situation?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going into that.

Q Were any of the Truman vetoes overridden?

MR. NESSEN: No, it seems the first couldn't have been. That was H.R. 1. Then, on July 18, there was H.R. 3950, which was almost identical, so I would say that was a new bill rather than an overridden bill.

Then, the next spring there was H.R. 4790. That would have been the only one -- do you know whether it was overridden? I don't know why we need to get into that.

Q If he suddenly gets a bill with no amendments, he likes it and it is clean, will he reconsider his trip to Palm Springs?

MR. NESSEN: Let's leave it where it is, Phil. That is hypothetical.

Q Ron, last week, in answer to some questions about vetoes and things, you were giving us the constant answer that the most important thing here was the speed with which a tax cut was voted.

Now, suddenly, they voted out a bill the White House doesn't like and speed becomes less important.

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not less important. I don't know why you say "less important." That is one of the reasons he is reconsidering his vacation, so he doesn't have to wait 18 days for Congress to get back from its Easter vacation.

Q You gave us a primary reason. Are there other reasons? What are the other reasons?

MR. NESSEN: That is the primary reason.

Q Is there a secondary reason?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is the primary reason.

Q Ron, on the \$3.67 billion foreign aid, does the President regard this bill just passed, which includes aid even for Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and so forth; does he look on this as anti-inflationary? Are we still trying to whip the inflation?

MR. NESSEN: I am afraid I don't understand the question.

Q What is the President's viewpoint on this bill that proposes providing money to Saudi Arabia?

MR. NESSEN: The President is disappointed that Congress made such a large cut in the bill. He is especially disappointed about the very deep cut in humanitarian funds for South Vietnam.

As you know, he proposed \$900-some billion in humanitarian reconstruction funds for South Vietnam. Congress cut that down to about \$450 billion or so, more than in half. That is a disappointment.

The dollar figure is a disappointment because it is considerably lower than what he felt was should be sent.

Q By giving all of this overseas, what effect does he feel it will have on inflation as well as the fact that there are old people on fixed incomes that are buying dog food at the present time? Should we be sending all of this overseas, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: America is a big enough and strong enough country to be able to fulfill its commitments, both at home and overseas. Is that it?

Q Have you heard anything on the resignation of Alexander Butterfield?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce now.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 12:22 P.M. EDT)