

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#193

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:33 P.M. EDT

APRIL 22, 1975

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: Is Bob Schieffer here?

Bob, I wanted to ask you a question this morning about whether you could clear up the conflict between you and Walter over the color of the room?

Q We never interpret from this podium. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Bob, there is a clear conflict there, and I wonder if we could get it straightened out.

Q We don't see any inconsistency. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Don't you want to clarify Walter's remarks?

Q We never interpret. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Bob, could I just leave the question with you, and you go back and ask Walter? I mean, did you ask him this morning? (Laughter)

You know about the Republican Congressional leadership meeting, which lasted about two hours. You had a chance to talk to Senator Case and to Congressman Rhodes.

The majority of the meeting was taken up with Vietnam, and Secretaries Kissinger and Schlesinger gave some factual information on the situation. I think the Senator and Congressman gave you a pretty thorough readout of what was discussed.

There were other matters, though. Jim Lynn talked about the Congressional budget committees working on budget ceilings, and he pointed out that both the Senate and House committee ceilings were above what the President had said was acceptable to him. He also said there was some difference in the way the figures were treated.

MORE

#193

He said that the figures of the Senate and House budget committees' ceilings that they set were substantially better than the \$100 billion which had been talked about if all the legislation passed but still were too high.

The President said that he felt that there was some good news in these ceilings, and that was that at least the House committee had accepted a 5 percent ceiling on Federal pay raises and a 7 percent ceiling on Social Security increases.

He said this process is forcing Congress to do what he has been proposing all along, which is to take a view of total spending rather than just going through bill by bill and not caring what they add up to.

The President also said that the figures were higher than he wants, but better than the \$100 billion. The process is not over yet, and he would hope that in the end they would adopt the ceiling that he set.

The final matter on the agenda this morning was the energy bill. There was some considerable discussion of where it stands and what progress is being made.

Frank Zarb gave a report on his negotiations, which was similar to the one he gave you. There was a discussion of whether the President should impose the next dollar of the increase in the oil import tariff on May 1st, and there was no decision reached on that question.

Q Did any of the Members of Congress express support for such a move?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they did.

Q Will we get a report on that this week?

MR. NESSEN: I think Frank said toward the end of the week the President would need to be getting close to a decision.

A meeting is going on now. It began at noon, with the energy and economic advisers, in the Cabinet Room and, depending on what is accomplished there, we could either have a briefing or a posting. John Carlson is in the meeting, and I will check with him when he comes out, and we will do one or the other.

At 2:00, the President is going to meet with the Executive Committee of the House Republican Study Committee. This meeting is at the request of the committee. The chairman is Representative Marjorie Holt, of Maryland. There are about 70 or 75 Members. The committee asked for the meeting to raise a number of subjects with the President, and I don't have a list to give you. There are some matters that the committee wanted to discuss with the President.

At 5:00 this afternoon, the President is going to meet with 17 general presidents of the building and construction trades unions to discuss their views on the economy and the state of the construction industry. Others who will attend the meeting include Vice President Rockefeller, Bill Seidman, Jim Lynn, Frank Zarb and Secretaries Dunlop and Hills.

I can give you a little more on the New Orleans trip tomorrow, some rough times. We will have the printed schedule sometime this afternoon, but so you can plan your day, I can run through this for you if you would like.

7:30 will be the press check-in at Andrews. We will not have a bus from here tomorrow. At 8:15, the press plane departs from Andrews. At 8:30, the President leaves the South Lawn. At 8:50, Air Force One departs Andrews.

At 9:40 Central Daylight Time, which is an hour behind Washington time, the press plane will land at Moisant Field.

Q Is that the press?

MR. NESSEN: That is the press plane at 9:40, and Air Force One at 10:15 at the general aviation ramp.

Then, there will be a motorcade to the F. Edward Hebert Library, which is on the lake front of Lake Pontchartrain. That is 10:20 the motorcade leaves the airport, and it is apparently a short ride because the ground-breaking ceremony begins at 10:50.

I did find some information about the library. This is a domed structure, as you will see tomorrow. It will be, actually. This is an artist's rendering. It is going to cost between \$500,000 and \$900,000.

Q Plus overruns?

MR. NESSEN: It will be built on levy parkland, donated in January by the Orleans Levy Board. It will house the memorabilia that Congressman Hebert has collected during his more than 33 years in the House. The money to build it is being raised by the F. Edward Hebert Foundation from public subscriptions. Construction is beginning tomorrow, and it will take about a year to complete. It will contain his papers, citations and plaques that he has received, a faithful reproduction of his office --

Q Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: That is true, yes. All this is true, every word. (Laughter)

-- also, pens used by Presidents to sign important legislation, historic photographs and paintings, including a copy of the original Howard Chandler Christy painting of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima.

There will be gavels used by Congressman Hebert to chair committees, and the first photograph of the earth taken by astronaut Mike Collins on his moon flight.

So, that is what the library is all about.

Q Ron, will this library be maintained by the Archives? Will there be any Federal taxpayers portion in here?

MR. NESSEN: According to the Times Picayune, which we all have to agree is a first-rate newspaper, the goal is \$1 million, of which \$200,000 has already been raised. This will leave approximately \$400,000 in excess of the construction cost to be spent for maintenance.

Q But my question has not been answered. My question is, will there be any Federal taxpayers' money in maintenance?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Not that you know of, but this is an obvious question here.

MR. NESSEN: I agree, and will check it for your.

Q What will be the subject of the President's speech?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen any of the speeches tomorrow, but from what I have heard, I would say that for the hard news speech, you should look for the lunchtime speech as the hard news speech. I do anticipate that all three speeches will be out late this afternoon or early this evening.

Q Where is the lunch speech?

MR. NESSEN: The Navy League speech, which is the lunch speech, I think will be the substantive speech for the daytime part of the trip.

Q Several days ago, there was a report, I believe, from the area of protest by environmentalists, and I wonder whether your New Orleans advisers are familiar with that or can you tell us whether that is so?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that at all.

Q Does your adviser know about it?

Q Let's go through the schedule, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I am trying to push ahead here.

We got the ground-breaking ceremony starting at 10:50, and the President will speak at 11:05. It is possible he will speak off-the-cuff, so there may be no text at all. If there is a text, I think we may not get it until on the plane going down there tomorrow. The Navy League speech, I do think we will get for tonight, and we will put it out, if you care to, for flat p.m. release.

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

The ground-breaking ceremonies are over, and at 11:45, the President goes by motorcade to the Fairmont Hotel. At 12:30, there is a luncheon at the Fairmont in connection with the 73rd Annual Navy League Convention. That is in the Imperial Ball Room of the Fairmont Hotel.

At 2:05, the President speaks at that convention.

Q What is the full name of the Navy League?

MR. NESSEN: The 73rd Annual Navy League Convention. It is the Navy League, which you are familiar with, and they are having their 73rd annual convention in New Orleans.

At 2:05, the President speaks, and I think we will have a text for you this afternoon and will put it out for p.m. release.

At 2:45, the President will leave the hotel by helicopter for an hour ride to the "New Era," which is a semi-submersible offshore drilling rig, which is located 35 miles off the mouth of the Mississippi, and 100 miles from New Orleans. We will have a pool to go out there, and the pool will need to leave the press center of the Fairmont before the President speaks. The pool will need to leave at 1:30.

Q Who will be chosen from among those who have lost something? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The first prize goes to AP, UPI, Newsday, the NBC News crew and NBC correspondent, Cleve Ryan, Time correspondent, a Time photographer -- Time is a color pool -- AP photo, UPI photo and NBC radio technician, Aldo.

We will post this later.

MORE

#193

Let me say this: the poolers should wear wind-breakers and rubbersoled shoes or tennis shoes. Also, just because of the season it is, you ought to bring rain-coats to New Orleans, in any case. The President will be on the oil rig for an hour.

MORE

Q What is the purpose of the oil rig visit?

MR. NESSEN: The purpose is to get a briefing on how this particular rig works and on the whole subject of off-shore oil, which, as you know, plays a big part in his energy program.

Q Whose rig is it? Shell, Exxon or what?

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Q Is this the first time any President has been on an off-shore oil rig?

MR. NESSEN: I think I can say that without any fear of contradiction.

At 6 o'clock the President goes back to the Fairmont Hotel, where large towels will be available for everyone. (Laughter)

At 7:45 the President leaves the hotel to go by car to the Tulane University Field House.

At 8:05, the President speaks there, and we hope to have the text of that out during the day tomorrow. Hopefully while everybody is over at the oil rig, the rest could be back writing. That will be for flat a.m. release.

The rig is owned by Diamond M. Drilling Company and is operated by Gulf Oil.

Q You don't know who is President of Diamond?

MR. NESSEN: I have a feeling you do. (Laughter)

The speech is at 8:05 at the field house of Tulane, and we will have the speech for you in the afternoon, embargoed for a.m.'s.

At 9:05 Central Time, Air Force One departs Moisant Field.

At 12:30, again back on Washington time now, Air Force One comes down at Andrews, and at 12:50 the President gets back on the South Lawn.

The press plane will follow after filing, and I would think certainly no more than an hour behind the President's plane.

The other good news is that Tulane University is laying on dinner and cocktails for the press covering the visit.

Q Ron, is the Tulane speech aimed at any particular program of Tulane University? Is it medical, medicine, or what?

MR. NESSEN: That is the one text I have not seen yet.

Let me add one other item to the President's schedule today.

At 1:15 the President is going to have lunch with six secretaries from the staff in honor of National Secretaries Week.

Q That is today?

MR. NESSEN: It is all week. This will be in the Conference Mess Room at the White House.

He is having lunch with Helen Donaldson, who has been here through six Presidents, coming during the Truman Administration, and she works primarily on Presidential scheduling in Warren Rustand's office; Dorothy Downton, who I think you know, has been with the President for eight years, in the House and as Vice President and here; Mildred Leonard, who I think you also know, has been with the President for more than 20 years; Mary Rollins, who also came to the White House during the Truman Administration, who is in charge of handling correspondence directed to the President which involves invitations or appointment requests; Ann Whitman, who you also know, who is now Chief of Staff to Vice President Rockefeller; and Nell Yates who has been at the White House since the Eisenhower Administration and now has her desk immediately outside the President's office.

Q Are any of these his secretary?

MR. NESSEN: Dorothy Downton and Mildred Leonard have both worked for him over the years, and Nell Yates, as I say, has the desk right outside his office.

The President is announcing the appointment today of Steven Danzansky and Earl Silbert to the Law Revision Board.

The President is also nominating Charles A. Cooper, who is now the Assistant Secretary of Treasury for International Affairs, to take on the additional job, without any extra pay, of United States Executive Director of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The President is also announcing the appointment of seven persons as members of the Board of Directors of the Student Loan Marketing Association. There is no pay involved with that job, either.

The President will nominate Richard C. Holmquist, of Westport, Connecticut, to be a member of the Renegotiation Board. When he is confirmed, he will be designated as Chairman of the Board by the President. That Board, as you know, handles the renegotiation of contracts with the Government.

The President is issuing a proclamation designating Sunday, May 11, as Mother's Day. Congress passed a joint resolution to that effect.

With that, I am told that the bible for the trip tomorrow will be available by 2 o'clock.

Q Ron, you said yesterday, I believe, that you would check and find out if the President is in favor of the death penalty. What is the answer?

MR. NESSEN: The answer is that while this matter is pending before the Supreme Court, the President does not feel it proper for him to state his own views publicly with possible interference in the legal proceeding.

Q Has he ever, in the past, to your knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know his complete record in the past, but I did ask him yesterday, and that is the way he preferred to handle it.

Q Did you ask him yesterday about his reactions when he heard the news about President Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: I did, and I really don't have anything to add to what I said yesterday.

Q I don't think you told us yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to add to that.

Q Ron, last night in discussing some public and corresponding private commitments made in 1972 and 1973, President Ford said one was the replacement of military hardware and, in addition, there was a commitment that we, as a Nation, would try to enforce the agreements that were signed in Paris in January of 1973.

Where was that commitment that we would try to enforce the agreements? Was that in the record?

MR. NESSEN: It was stated publicly.

Q Where was it stated publicly that we would try to enforce them?

MR. NESSEN: I no longer have with me that sheet we handed out.

Q I have, and I looked at it again. It said we would try to enforce.

MR. NESSEN: I thought Dr. Kissinger used those exact words in one of those particular statements.

Q At the time, you mean?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, immediately after, or a few days after the signing of the Paris accords, there was a joint communique between President Nixon and President Thieu.

Q Didn't all the signatories pledge to try to support the accords?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is true.

Q I didn't hear the question.

MR. NESSEN: Carroll points out that the document itself called for the signatories to use their influence to make sure that they were lived up to.

Q Excuse me, but "try to enforce" is the phrase I am looking at.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have those words in front of me anymore, but my memory is Dr. Kissinger used those words at the time in explaining publicly what the assurances were to South Vietnam.

Q His statement was not on the list of the three things you gave us, was it?

MR. NESSEN: There was an excerpt of a Kissinger news conference in there.

Q I thought there was a communique, and two statements by President Nixon in there. In other words, I don't remember Kissinger's statements on that sheet. I may be wrong.

MR. NESSEN: I saw one.

Q Perhaps you are referring to one of the private communications, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not.

Q That is what I am asking. Was that a private communication?

MR. NESSEN: No, I believe it was a Kissinger communication.

Q Whether it was or was not, you say it was not a private communication that you have seen, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: Just a second. You are particularly concerned with the word "enforcement"?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, my memory is there was a Kissinger news conference in which he used that word, which I don't have in front of me. The public record makes clear in the three particular pieces we handed out that day, the word "enforcement" is not used.

The tone of the three pieces that we put out is in that direction and, if you will give me the time to dig out what I believe was a Kissinger news conference -- which I, at one time, had with me, but don't seem to now -- I think I can show you where that word was used publicly.

Q Your contention is that the phrase "react vigorously to the violations" implies enforcement. Do I understand that correctly?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, could you clarify something? Apparently former President Thieu had the impression, gained from somewhere, that what Nixon had in mind when he used publicly the expression "react vigorously" meant bombing or other military intervention on the part of the United States.

Having read the document yourself, can you say whether that is in fact what "react vigorously" means, and that is the way we should interpret it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is possible for me to say what I believe the expressions in the letter meant. I think, based on the public statements of President Thieu and other South Vietnamese officials, I would agree with you they seem to have gotten that impression.

But, as the President pointed out last night, and as I tried to when we talked about this before, if that was indeed their impression, they know what the Congress did in the summer of 1973, which, as the President pointed out, then left only one assurance in force, which was material aid.

MORE

Q We went over this a half dozen times. Let me ask you again, following up Morton's question, whether or not the words "bombing or military action or military intervention, military operations," or anything in that area are mentioned in private correspondence?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, as I have said before and I will say again, because it is what I have seen, and that is that the words of the letters, while different words, are in substance the same assurances that were given publicly.

Q Yes, you said that, of course, many times. Let me put it this way: the words are in substance the same in both public and private. In the private, are there any additional words?

MR. NESSEN: I say there are different words, but if what you are saying is, are there different assurances or commitments, the answer is no.

Q Ron, are the assurances any more specific in any way?

MR. NESSEN: I think in substance, they are the same.

We don't really need to do this again, do we? We have been through it so many times.

Q On the evacuation, 1,500 is the bottom figure now, and there will be no further American evacuations. You have been telling us this, that the number would be drawn down to basic essentials in terms of Americans left in Vietnam and now this morning, 1,500 figure comes as being the number at the end of the day today. Is that the end of the American evacuation for the time being? Is that the essential necessary force that is left?

MR. NESSEN: The 1,500 which Senator Case and Congressman Rhodes reported to you is the number that is sort of, I think Congressman Rhodes said, the skeleton crew needed to continue the operations in Saigon.

Q To continue what operations?

MR. NESSEN: The U.S. mission. You know, the AP and UPI and NBC and humanitarian agencies and those kinds of things.

Q How many of those personnel are U.S. Government personnel as opposed to private individuals such as the news media types? In other words, I would like to know what the size is of the --

Q Ron, you said this morning that the situation there, that there is no total evacuation because the situation is still fluid. What do you mean by that?

MR. NESSEN: What I mean by that is that at this moment, it is truly not possible to say what is going to happen. I think the President gave some indication of that last night. It is just simply not clear right now whether North Vietnam will make a military attack on the city or whether there will be a negotiation without an attack, both, or how the negotiations will go or what they will center on.

It just simply isn't possible at the moment to know what is going to happen next. Because of that, there is no additional decision on evacuating the remaining 1,500.

Q Ron, is this Government seeking a 7-day cease-fire for the purposes of evacuating Americans?

MR. NESSEN: I checked that, Peter, just before I came out and that is not right. The purpose of requesting the additional money, as Secretary Kissinger said on the Hill yesterday, is to -- and in light of the fact that nobody does know what is going to happen next -- is to assure that there are what he called a controlled -- there are controlled circumstances which would permit whatever happens, whatever of these choices I mentioned happens, will be done in controlled circumstances so that the United States can evacuate its civilians, if it comes to that, and as many Vietnamese as it can. But specifically, there is no plan that I know of to specifically ask for a 7-day cease-fire.

Q The President spoke of diplomatic activities last night. Can you be more specific? Who are we in touch with?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, there are what the President said last night and I just think this is an especially delicate moment, and I am just not going to be able to expand beyond that.

Q Ron, how would this money be spent to assure a controlled situation over there?

MR. NESSEN: As it was explained at the leadership meeting this morning, the request would bolster both the morale of the South Vietnamese at this moment and also provide them with sufficient arms that the North Vietnamese might be dissuaded from making a final military attack on Saigon and instead agree to a negotiated settlement.

Q Ron, how do you square that last part of that statement, "provide them with arms and ammunitions so that the North Vietnamese might be dissuaded from making a final attack on Saigon," how do you square that with General Weyand's testimony before the House committee, I believe yesterday, that South Vietnam is no longer militarily defensible.

The man who went out there, the Army man, a 4-star General, Army Chief of Staff, says this country is no longer defensible and you are asking for money on the grounds it would provide a chance to defend Saigon.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see that there is a conflict, Jim.

Q You don't? I see.

MR. NESSEN: But I would be happy to discuss it.

The hope is that whatever does happen would happen in a humane way and a controlled way, and the President feels that the way to assure that is, or one way to assure that is to have the remaining South Vietnamese forces equipped and their morale not destroyed so that the North Vietnamese would see that they were equipped with good morale and instead of launching a final attack on Saigon, would go for a negotiated settlement.

Q Why would the North Vietnamese reach that conclusion if they read General Weyand's testimony or heard about it? What circumstances would you foresee under that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the full context of General Weyand's remarks. But I am relaying to you what the President's views on it are.

Q One of the Members of Congress who came out here, I believe it was Senator Case, was asked if there was any sense in the meeting, if there was any hope of Saigon holding out or not falling, and he said he didn't sense that. Is the White House ready to admit there is no hope for Saigon holding out, withstanding the Communist assault, or whatever you want?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, the only way I can answer that question is in the way that I told Tom, which is at the moment, this Government -- and in fact, I suppose no government -- really knows what the next step in Vietnam will be.

Q Ron, has the President considered the possibility or has it been suggested to him by anybody whom he respects that with his successive references to the evacuation of the South Vietnamese that he may be raising hopes that cannot possibly be fulfilled amongst the South Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: That is another matter, John, that is not clear at the moment because one of the several possible outcomes could be a cease-fire or a negotiation that would permit the evacuation of South Vietnamese.

But the President, himself, last night, I think, didn't leave any doubt that if such an evacuation was opposed militarily by either side that it would be virtually impossible to do.

Q Ron, can you say something about the evacuation that is already underway of the South Vietnamese from Clark Air Force Base?

Q Specifically, how many people are involved?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have those figures, but as you know, we have a new coordinator of evacuation and refugees, and so forth, namely, Ambassador Brown, and I think he will give you those numbers.

Just to catch up a little bit on Walt's -- I tell you frankly, Walt, these figures are outdated now by the evacuation.

Q Would you say 50 percent?

MR. NESSEN: Let me look it over and see if I can give you -- I don't know that this is fair. What is the date on this -- 14 April, that is over a week old.

Your question was?

Q Of the 1,500 Americans considered the skeletal force, how many of them are U.S. Government employees as opposed to non-U.S. Government employees, as for example, NBC, the wires, and so on?

MR. NESSEN: It looks to me -- just looking at this quickly -- that it is divided into about three equal sections, at least it was at the time these figures were put together.

Now, the evacuations, since then, may have changed these ratios, but at that time, it looked to me like it was about a third Government employees, a third civilians, that is, newsmen and others, and a third U.S. contractors.

Q That is when there were 5,000 there?

MR. NESSEN: That is when there were over 4,000. I think again Ambassador Brown would be a good one to give you updated figures on these.

Q This morning I asked you if -- in view of what you said again about the possibility of Vietnamese evacuation being part of an agreement, a cease-fire proposal. How high a priority does this have from the U.S., and is it the kind of thing you read in Bill Sheehan this morning, that we would be willing to bargain away something or other, that it is our policy to do something substantive in negotiations.

MR. NESSEN: I have heard the President speak on it, and know how strongly he feels about it, and also the Secretary. I certainly wouldn't look upon it as something that would be bargained away. But, I do think you have to keep in mind the difficulties that the President pointed out last night.

Q Ron, on another subject, the President last night said he believed the Soviet Union wants peace in the Middle East.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you give us some guidance on what leads him to that conclusion or what he bases that on?

MR. NESSEN: I think he said all along, and said publicly, if I remember correctly, all through the delicate step-by-step negotiations that the Soviet Union has never done anything to upset or interfere with that.

Q Ron, I am sorry, but did you say just a moment ago that the President left no doubt last night that if the evacuation were opposed by either side, that it would be virtually impossible to execute?

MR. NESSEN: I do have his exact words, and maybe we ought to refer to those, but I thought that was -- without a sizeable number of troops -- well, you can find it in here. I didn't mean to change it in any way.

Q That is not my interpretation of what he said at all. The question I have for you is that if this evacuation is opposed by either side, will the United States attempt to do it? I am speaking now of the evacuation of South Vietnamese.

MR. NESSEN: Gene, I hate to fall back on this continually, but it is really the fact that at this moment there is no clear idea of what is going to happen next over there, and I just don't want to speculate on what might or might not happen under certain conditions when we don't know what the conditions will be.

Q I know that, Ron, but there is a substantial military armada massing over there.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. I shouldn't say that is right.

Q The impression a lot of us had was it was there to perform an evacuation exercise not only for the Americans, but for Vietnamese. I do know they would like to perform this under truce conditions, but what I am trying to find out is if they will attempt to perform it if there is no truce, if there is no agreement.

MR. NESSEN: If you recall his answer last night, it was the one where he said if this and if that and if that, there are a lot of if's in this answer. There are a lot of if's in the answer to that, Gene.

First of all, it would not be possible to launch an evacuation effort for Vietnamese without the necessary Congressional approval, and it is not clear whether that will be given. It is not clear what the conditions will be if it comes to an evacuation. So, I just think it is a hypothetical question that I can't answer.

Q Ron, let me ask you this question, which I don't think is hypothetical. Does the President have a clear understanding that if there is no change in the law, that he cannot use American troops to take away South Vietnamese?

MR. NESSEN: He understands that he cannot launch a separate operation using American military forces to take away only Vietnamese. Now, there might be the situation that there was in Cambodia where you could remove some Vietnamese in connection with an evacuation of Americans.

Q He interprets the law as permitting that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you rule out, along that line, the dropping in of a very large number of American troops who swoop up the 1500 Americans who are left and then tens of thousands of South Vietnamese all at the same time? The Americans would sort of go out as the tail of the dog, but, nonetheless, they would be going out at the same time.

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think we can go any farther on the question of evacuation because we don't know what the conditions will be.

Q Ron, the people have a right to know what the policies and plans of the White House are.

MR. NESSEN: I agree with you, Sarah.

Q You do know, the White House does know, what the policies and plans are. They may not know what is going to happen, but they do know that, and that is what we are asking.

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, the President, in this situation, as you know, took note of the War Powers Act at the time of the Cambodian evacuation and certainly would do that again. I am simply saying several things. One, it is a very delicate situation with evacuation.

Q It is very delicate over here, too, Ron, because this situation could get us right back into the war.

MR. NESSEN: I can assure you that whatever evacuation is undertaken, it will be for the purpose only of evacuation and not to become reinvolved in the war.

Q Some people thought I interrupted you. I didn't mean to interrupt you, but I didn't want you to be repeating yourself to say the same thing. I wanted you to understand we want to know.

They were going to take away last week -- or the week before he told Republican leaders he would take out 170,000 Vietnamese civilians, and I think it got to be 175,000.

How many have gone out now, and how many more of that total are yet to be brought out?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, that is a question that needs to be addressed to Ambassador Brown because I have not kept up with the day-to-day total evacuation.

Q President Ford has. He has to get a report from Ambassador Brown, and Ambassador Brown is not going to tell us.

MR. NESSEN: I think he will.

Q Aside from the South Vietnamese -- and I want to make this clear -- is it true the President understands he has the authority and has the intention to evacuate all Americans, whether or not it requires military force?

MR. NESSEN: He does, I believe, believe that he has the inherent right under the Constitution to protect American lives.

Q And the intent to do so?

MR. NESSEN: If it comes to that, he would.

Q Just so I understand Jim's question, and your answer in regard to Cambodia; that is, as part of that operation, it might be possible to bring out a limited number of South Vietnamese.

MR. NESSEN: As part of the evacuation of Americans, yes.

Q Is there a limit on that number?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the limit.

Q Is there a cut-off point at which time it no longer gets to be an American operation?

MR. NESSEN: You know, we did all these same questions last week.

Q Yes, but now we have a whole bunch of Marines, aircraft carriers, destroyers and all kinds of things moving in the direction of the South China Sea, so we would like to ask about it.

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish what I started to say when Sarah asked the question. If I have less than all the answers you are interested in, it is because of several things.

One, it is not clear what is going to happen next and what the conditions will be. It is not clear what Congress' judgment will be on the legislation the President has asked for.

It is not clear what the conditions in Vietnam are going to be. Finally, it is a delicate question which we have talked about before, that by TV talking about great details of cut-off points, and selling out, or bargaining away, the talk itself could affect the lives and safety of some of the people we are talking about.

I think for those reasons I have to be somewhat limited in the details I can give you.

Q Ron, on another subject, I would like to ask this: Yesterday the press officer of the Zambian Embassy said, "No one would dare start an opposition party to Dr. Kuanda's one-party government in Zambia." As for the press, he said there are two daily newspapers who offer only what he determined "constructive criticism."

My question is this: Is this what President Ford meant when he toasted Zambia as "an example of respect and admiration throughout the world"? Or, is it possible the President is not very familiar with the Zambian one-party system and constructive criticism only?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can comment on the internal organization of another country, Les.

Q The President did, and I am just wondering-- considering it is only a one-party system--how could the President have said that this is an example for the world? Is there any explanation of that, Ron, or does the President not know very much -- I mean, he can't keep track of every country.

MR. NESSEN: I think he probably does know the situation.

Q And he still made that statement?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't comment on another country's policies.

Q Ron, I would like to follow up Jim Deakin's question earlier. I would like to know if the General was speaking only for himself yesterday or does that reflect the Administration's view?

What General Weyand said was Vietnam was indefensible but the people of South Vietnam, the soldiers there, don't believe it is indefensible, and as long as they believe that, it is incumbent upon us to give them aid. Is that the Administration's position?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to look at the whole context of it because I remember reading it slightly differently, John.

Q Does the President plan to go anywhere Thursday?

MR. NESSEN: Of this week?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. Have you heard of any plans?

Q The rumor is Pittsburgh.

MR. NESSEN: It is not on his schedule.

MORE

Q Despite your reluctance to talk about it, may I ask one question, please? When the President talked about the CIA, he obviously endorsed a lot of covert activities last night, and said he thought they were necessary besides intelligence gathering. Did he include assassination?

MR. NESSEN: No. I thought at least one other time he had said he was opposed to assassination and had given orders it was not to be done under his Administration.

Q Last night he didn't say that and it struck some people, perhaps erroneously, but it struck some people he was defining covert activities awfully broadly. He said it was wide-ranging, and so forth. Does he stand by that previous statement? We have not seen last night a change in the previous statement.

MR. NESSEN: No, he stands by his opposition to assassination.

Q Can you enlighten us as to what he was talking about, what sorts of activities he was talking about other than intelligence gathering?

MR. NESSEN: No, because he was asked the same thing and said no, and I always like to say the same thing he said.

Q One more evacuation question, Ron. In California this morning, a relief official named Hayes said Government officials had told him to be prepared to handle up to 1 million evacuees from South Vietnam. Is it possible the President is considering a figure as high as this?

MR. NESSEN: I think the night the President made his foreign policy speech to Congress, a high American official --

Q Officials.

MR. NESSEN: -- officials, excuse me -- told you of various categories of people who might, under the best of circumstances, should be evacuated. I think that was the highest number given that night, if I remember.

Q 150,000 or 200,000, and that figure is the figure still being discussed in the Government?

MR. NESSEN: That is the figure, yes.

MORE

Q I am concerned about the legal problem here. You say the President thinks the law permits him to take South Vietnamese evacuees out of South Vietnam as long as there are some Americans to be evacuated --

MR. NESSEN: Let me tidy up what I just said, Walt.

Q I wish you would. A certain official over in the EOB said the law did not permit the President to do that. But you said there is precedence in the Cambodian situation and I am very confused about what the law really is there, and the appearance that there might be an attempt to circumvent the law by using American troops to pull out large numbers of South Vietnamese as long as there remains a large number of Americans, such as 1,500.

MR. NESSEN: There is no attempt to circumvent the law. There is one law we are dealing with here and then there is an inherent Presidential responsibility that we are dealing with here.

The law is the War Powers Act, which requires notification of Congress on the use of American troops for a very short period of time and the President did take note of that law and did notify Congress of the evacuation from Cambodia which involved the use of American troops.

Q A very small number of Cambodians.

MR. NESSEN: And a very small number of Cambodians.

The second element here is what the President believes to be his inherent constitutional right to protect the lives of Americans. That is what he relied on legally to remove the Americans from Phnom Penh. The military operation there was designed to evacuate Americans and in connection with that some few Cambodians were taken out.

Q Hold it a minute, Ron. You said "some few." There were a heck of a lot more Cambodians than Americans in that operation, twice as many, in fact, by the President's own words in his letter to the Speaker and the President Pro Tem of the Senate.

MR. NESSEN: Let me just say this: I think we are in the same sort of philosophical debate we got into last week on Cambodia. Perhaps you disagree with the idea of taking out any Vietnamese, I don't know.

What I am saying is the President believes he has the right to remove Americans who are in danger of their lives under his constitutional right. Now, whether there will be any, or how many Vietnamese who are taken out as part of the evacuation of Americans, I simply have no idea and can't speculate on it.

Q You just said there would be between a 150,000 and 200,000 taken out.

MR. NESSEN: To clear up a question that came up earlier, I think from Jim, as to why did the President use the word "enforcement" last night, there was a briefing by Dr. Kissinger at Palm Springs -- was this last week, two weeks ago, or whatever -- in which he said -- the question was: "Mr. Secretary, the President spoke in his press conference of solemn commitments we have made. This raises various questions of secret agreements. First of all, what solemn agreements? Was he referring to one-to-one replacements, and so forth?"

Dr. Kissinger's answer was that he was talking about a moral commitment. The South Vietnamese had ever reason to think that if they permitted American troops to withdraw and they enabled us to retrieve our prisoners, we would carry out what he had called the Vietnamization process to enable them to defend themselves.

We did not give them any definite figures or definite promises except to indicate in signing the Paris Accords we would have an interest in their re-inforcements.

Q Would you repeat that?

MR. NESSEN: This is Dr. Kissinger's news conference of two or three weeks ago.

Q I don't want to belabor the point but you said, "I don't know whether you think we should evacuate Americans or not."

It is not a matter of that or how many South Vietnamese any reporter in this room thinks should be evacuated. It is a matter of law and what the President feels the limits of the law enable him to evacuate in terms of South Vietnamese.

I will phrase the question this way: Under the War Powers Act, how many South Vietnamese -- in the absence of specific clarifying Congressional permission to evacuate South Vietnamese -- how many South Vietnamese does he think he can pull out when he pulls out 1,500 Americans under the law?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you any answer to that, Walt.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:27 P.M. EDT)

#193