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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#194

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:50 A.M. EDT

APRIL 24, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: I want to go a little fast today because Ambassador Brown is having a briefing at the State Department at 12:30, which some of you may want to go to, in which he will answer your questions on the evacuation of refugees -- Americans, South Vietnamese and so forth.

Let's move along and see if we can wrap up for people who want to go over there.

To clean up a question Sarah asked the other day, there are no Federal funds involved in the building or maintenance of the F. Edward Hebert Library.

The President met this morning with a series of staff members.

At 12:45, the President will meet with Congressman Paul Findley, who will report to the President on a trip to Europe he made recently, especially a meeting on April 14 to 16, a series of meetings of eleven American legislators with the European Parliament in Munich.

At 2:00, the President is meeting with his Labor-Management Committee in the Cabinet Room. There will be photographs or film if you desire at the beginning of that meeting. This is the President's fourth meeting with the Labor-Management Committee.

The President wants to discuss and hear from the members their views on the general economic outlook and on initiatives for encouraging the capital formation by corporations.

This afternoon at 5:10, in the East Room, the President will be speaking to the Advertising Council. That will be open for coverage. There will be a reception after that for which there will be no coverage. About 175 members of the Advertising Council are in Washington for the 31st annual Washington conference.

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At 2:00 tomorrow, the President will speak in the East Room to about 125 State legislative leaders from more than 40 States who are in town for a leadership seminar sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The President will speak and there will be open coverage of that. There will be some later speakers, too, and there are no plans for coverage of that.

Q Will there be any questions and answers?

MR. NESSEN: No. It is a statement and it will relate, I believe, to revenue sharing.

The fact of the matter is that tomorrow, the President will send to Congress legislation proposing the extension and revision of the General Revenue Sharing Act of 1972. That will go up to Congress at noon, as legislation normally does.

At 10:30 tomorrow here in the briefing room, we will have Under Secretary of the Treasury Edward C. Schmultz and Graham Watt, the Director of the Office of Revenue Sharing, to answer your questions and to explain this legislation to you.

Now, we will need to make that briefing embargoed for whatever time the legislation is transmitted to the Hill, which I think is noon. We have not quite worked out the times yet.

You will get a bundle of material here at the briefing at 10:30 in the morning.

Q Will the text of the President's 2:00 speech be ready in advance?

MR. NESSEN: What is the outlook on that text?

We don't know at the moment.

Tomorrow evening, as you know, the President is going to New Haven, Connecticut, to attend the sesquicentennial convocation dinner for the Yale Law School. The President graduated from the Yale Law School, as you know. The President will be leaving the White House at 5:30. He will be leaving Andrews at 5:50 and he will arrive at the Tweed-New Haven Airport at 7:00 p.m. The campus is very close by. He will be there at 7:05, the dinner begins at 8:00, the President will speak at 9:50, and I am told that the remarks will be broadcast in the local area.

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After his remarks, the President will leave Yale at 10:15, he will leave the Tweed-New Haven Airport at 10:30, he will arrive at Andrews at 11:40 and will be back at the White House at midnight.

A press bus will be at the Southwest Gate at 3:45 tomorrow if enough people want to ride out on the bus. So, call Ray Zook's office if you want a bus and we will figure out whether there is enough. Regardless, the check-in time at Andrews is 4:30 for the press.

The press plane leaves Andrews at 5:00 and arrives in New Haven at 6:10.

If we have an advance text -- and I think we will -- I would think that the press plane would probably come back pretty shortly after Air Force One takes off. Air Force One for tomorrow is going to be a Jetstar.

Q Is that because of the size of the airport?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, otherwise he would have had to go to Hartford and chopper to New Haven.

Q Is that the field where they had the serious crash a couple of years ago?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that.

Q Are we going on Piedmont?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Is there a pool on the Jetstar?

MR. NESSEN: No pool on the Jetstar. There will be a DC-9, which will take off simultaneously with the Jet Star and will land simultaneously, and the pool will be on that plane.

Q Will land simultaneously?

MR. NESSEN: In opposite directions, too. (Laughter)

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Q Who else will be on the DC-9?

MR. NESSEN: They will be additional members to the party, and I don't have their names at the moment.

Q Do you have the subject of the speech, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: In the general area of law and perhaps crime.

Q Why is the President traveling in a separate airplane from the rest of the staff aboard the DC-9?

MR. NESSEN: That is a good question. Why isn't he going on the DC-9? It doesn't have the communications, I guess.

Q The Jetstar has.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I don't know the answer and will look into that.

The President is naming four officials of the Executive Branch to the National Commission on Supplies and Shortages. They are Secretary Simon, Bill Seidman, Jim Lynn and Alan Greenspan. Secretary Simon will be the Chairman of that Commission. If you have questions about what the Commission does, ask John Carlson.

The President also will nominate W. Laird Stabler, Jr., to be U.S. Attorney for the District of Delaware.

The President is sending Congress his annual Manpower Report. You have the letter of transmittal, and we have copies of the report in the Press Office for those of you who want them.

The President is transmitting to Congress a proposed budget amendment in the amount of \$10.9 million for the Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Q Are we supposed to have releases on these things?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Don't you?

Q We have two.

MR. NESSEN: What you don't have will be along very shortly.

The information on that is available in the Press Office and also will be posted.

The President is sending to the Hill today for Congressional approval a trade agreement with Rumania, signed on April 2 in Bucharest by the American Ambassador, Harry G. Barnes. This is the first agreement to be negotiated under the Trade Act of 1974.

In accordance with the provisions required under that Act, it approves most favored nation with Rumania for goods exported to the United States. The President believes it will give further impetus to improved U.S.-Rumanian political and economic relations.

It will foster additional American exports to the growing markets of Rumania and will remove the non-most favored nation treatment of Rumanian products in the United States market.

Most favored nation treatment for Rumania is a goal which the Administration has pursued for several years, and it represents a key to full normalization for U.S.-Rumanian economic relations.

Let me give you a name and phone number in the Office of the Special Trade Representative, who will be able to answer your questions on this. His name is John Donaldson, and his phone number is 395-6127. There is a fairly full packet of material that goes with that.

Since it is noon now, I can announce King Hussein of Jordan will make a private visit to the United States beginning late this month. At the President's invitation, the King will visit Washington and meet with the President on April 29.

The President will host a working dinner in the King's honor that evening on April 29. He will also meet with other high officials, as well as with Members of Congress.

You may recall King Hussein was here last August 16. This current visit, the one coming, will provide an opportunity for the President and the King to renew their personal acquaintance, as well as to discuss matters of common interest in the spirit of warm and close relationships between the United States and Jordan.

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I think that is about it.

Q Ron, on scheduling, there is a rumor going around that he is going up to the Hill tonight.

MR. NESSEN: To the Hill?

Q To unveil a portrait.

MR. NESSEN: If we have anything else to add to the schedule, I will announce it later this afternoon.

Q This package on Rumania, is that in addition to what has been passed out already?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is several pieces. It is a proclamation, an Executive Order and a text of letters, and a second Executive Order waiving the Trade Act.

Q Ron, is the President going to Norfolk Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is he going anywhere Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q To Arlington Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: What is Arlington?

Q Some kind of meeting.

MR. NESSEN: I haven't got the weekend schedule. He will be in this area over the weekend.

Q Congressman Rinaldo of New Jersey has expressed serious concern over what he says is Secretary Kissinger's view on the Panama Canal, who should control it. I am just wondering, what is the President's position on this, vis-a-vis his speech to the Navy League, emphasizing the need for an effective Navy?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't have an opportunity or anticipate that question would come up, so I didn't ask the President his views on that, but I will endeavor to get them for you.

Q Ron, do you know when the visit of King Hussein was arranged?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Peter.

Q Can you tell us whether Hussein is going to vacation in this country as well. You say it is a private visit. He often visits in Florida. Is that part of his visit?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to check with the Jordanian Embassy. I don't know what the rest of his schedule is.

Q Ron, has the President reassessed his request for \$722 million for Vietnam in military aid? Is he going to inform or tell Congress anything about it today?

MR. NESSEN: The President's request for the \$722 million is still before Congress. The President still believes that the approval of additional military aid would help stabilize the situation and would help to bring about a cease-fire, or a negotiated settlement.

He points out that there is an existing authorization for an additional \$300 million that would require only an appropriation, no new authorization, and he would like to have from Congress as much military aid as it is possible to obtain.

Q In other words, Ron, he would now accept the \$300 million as the figure?

MR. NESSEN: As much as it is possible to obtain, he feels is needed.

Q Do you have any reaction to the bills the Senate and House passed on aid and evacuation?

MR. NESSEN: The President is gratified that both the House and Senate have taken favorable action on his request for humanitarian assistance for South Vietnam and on the clarification of his authority to deploy American military elements, if necessary, for an evacuation. He naturally hopes that it will not be necessary.

The President is encouraged that the House and Senate conferees are meeting promptly to expedite this legislation, and he is hopeful that the conferees will reconcile their differences in favor of more flexible language regarding the use of funds for evacuation and humanitarian purposes. The President also hopes that Congress will take swift action by approving an actual appropriation as quickly as possible.

Q Ron, is the President at all disturbed by the fact that Congress did not meet his April 19 deadline?

MR. NESSEN: I think he said himself at the ASNE that he was hopeful for April 19, or within a few days. It is within a few days.

Q Ron, how does this square, when the President said last night, "As far as America is concerned, the war is over," and you are saying now he would like as much military aid as he can get. How do you connect these two positions?

MR. NESSEN: His statement that Vietnam is finished as far as America is concerned, and then as you see within the context of the rest of the speech, it had to do with a kind of shift of focus or attention to the rest of the world.

There are matters to finish in Vietnam, primarily dealing with stabilizing the situation, evacuating Americans, and evacuating South Vietnamese to whom the United States feels a special obligation.

Stabilization is a word that has been used ever since the foreign policy speech to Congress and it is those remaining matters that he feels would be helped by this extra military aid.

Q The President meant last night it was over with except for these exceptions you mentioned? He did not give a complete statement last night?

MR. NESSEN: There is no modification in what the President said last night. I am just trying to explain the actual situation.

Q Ron, to clarify, has the President changed his mind about his evaluation about how the debacle in South Vietnam came to happen? He said time and time again that the failure of the United States to live up to certain commitments kicked off -- to use that expression -- the demise of the Saigon government. Does he still feel that or does this speech auger a new approach to the problem?

MR. NESSEN: Mort, I would say that you ought to read his words, which answer your question, I think, as well as any. "America can regain a sense of pride that existed before Vietnam but it cannot be achieved by re-fighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned. The time has come to look forward to an agenda for the future." He repeated that several times and that is his position, and has been.

Q Do you consider this a shift in position?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, on that point, the Vice President doesn't seem to share that view. He made some pretty strong statements on that trip out to Taiwan, including the fact that who caused the loss of Vietnam was Congress and that that would be a legitimate political issue next year.

Is the Vice President now going to be brought into line by the President on this or are we going to continue to hear récriminations from the Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I think the President's speech last night laid out his views of the direction America ought to look toward and I don't know that it needs any elaboration.

Q But is the Vice President going to stay in line, do you think?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather just speak for the President, Bob.

Q If there is no shift involved, can we expect a continuation of the kind of remarks that have been delivered at the ASNE and in the San Diego press conference and on the television program, the conversation the other night, in all of which the President in one form or another did point the finger of blame at Congress, is that going to stop?

MR. NESSEN: Again, Mort, the words he spoke last night speak for themselves. Just by way of putting that into context, in his speech to Congress -- which was what, two or three weeks ago, three weeks ago probably -- he said we must start afresh, which was really the forerunner of the line in last night's speech, "The war is finished." Last night's speech also was a natural follow-on to the Old North Church speech, so this isn't something that dropped out of the blue last night. It is a follow-on to the thoughts he has been expressing in a number of recent speeches.

Q Ron, I think the problem here is the Administration seems to be operating on a double track and what we are getting at is whether that other track has now stopped or swi ched?

MR. NESSEN: I think the words he said last night speak for themselves, Peter.

Q The words last night are basically an echo of the words of a speech he made in San Diego, but that doesn't stop what Mort is talking about, an inclination to let the facts speak for themselves and the record speak for itself, which means Congress is responsible.

Q Ron, what is the significance of --

Q I don't think that shrug answered a question.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear a question.

Q Is the second track now finished?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I don't know that I need to or can go beyond what he said last night. Those are clearly his views. He worked hard on the speech and it is what he intended to say and what he believes.

Q Ron, do you think that if the President's words really speak for themselves and solved this problem, do you think all of these people would be asking you these questions? I mean, these aren't stupid people. They really aren't. (Laughter) They are asking about a deliberate contradiction.

You said he spoke to Congress and said, we must think afresh. Then, wham, he goes up to the ASNE and blames Congress. Now, he says we must think afresh. Do you know, is he going to blame Congress or is that track over, to repeat Peter's question.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he has ever blamed Congress, Les, in any of these speeches or news conferences.

As he told, I think the CBS interviewers the other night, he has never, in any speech, volunteered any assessment of blame and on occasion, in response to questions, he has given what he considers to be a factual recitation of the events of the past couple of years.

But I can't remember ever a speech or a news conference in which he said, "I blame Congress."

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Q Ron, in the future, when he is asked a question -- as he said, pressed -- is he going to turn it aside and say, "I am not going to say anything about that," which is an easy answer?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather deal with the present and not with the future, Bill.

Q Ron, was last night's speech the first major statement dealing with foreign policy by the President that Secretary Kissinger did not take any hand in preparing and, if so, what is the significance of it?

MR. NESSEN: There is a complete sharing of views by the President and Secretary Kissinger. Their views are totally identical on this matter. Secretary Kissinger had an input on the speech. He sees the President daily for an hour, where he shares his views.

Q Doesn't that contradict what the President said on the airplane last night, that the Secretary had no role in preparing the speech?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the exact wording of that question was. It indicates in the pool report that the question was, "Did Secretary Kissinger play any part in the preparation of this speech?" I am not quite sure that was the question, but in any case --

Q That was the question, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Was it really? In any case, their views are totally identical.

Q Was the President's answer no? That is what the pool report says.

MR. NESSEN: I think it depends on what you mean by preparation, John. As I say, the Secretary did have an input, did share his views with the President and their views were identical.

Q Were Kissinger's views accepted and, if so, can you cite which portions of that speech represents Kissinger's views last night?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, their views are identical.

Q Ron, in view of the apparent lull for the past 72 hours in Vietnam, does the President believe that this is a conscious act of the North Vietnamese and VC to hold their advance to permit our evacuation or that they are merely re-equipping for the last drive?

In other words, has the former enemy acceded to some diplomatic overtures made through other governments?

MR. NESSEN: The situation there is very fluid and, as was the case the other day, it is not entirely clear to this Government what will happen next in Vietnam.

Q Ron, do you know whether this Government has had any contact yet with the new government, such as it is, in Saigon?

MR. NESSEN: Ambassador Martin has been in touch with the new government.

Q Ron, back on Rumania, in view of the fact that this Rumanian package appears to contain assurances on emigration from Rumania, could you give us an idea if this has any implication for future trade agreements with the Soviet Union or the Soviet bloc?

MR. NESSEN: I really think Mr. Donaldson is the place to direct your questions because I don't have that much background on the subject.

Q Can you say whether the United States has been in touch directly yet with either the PRG or the North Vietnamese in Paris?

MR. NESSEN: Mort, I think you will agree that the question of negotiations is a very delicate and sensitive one, and I just don't think it is proper to go into very much detail of diplomatic initiatives and context right now.

Q Ron, there was another report this morning of U.S. troops landing in Vietnam.

MR. NESSEN: Is that by the same people who put out yesterday's report?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: It is different people?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: They are also wrong.

Q Ron, there has been some speculation that the President was trying to draw some historical parallel last night when he mentioned the Battle of New Orleans taking place two weeks after that war. Is he suggesting that we may still expect casualties in this war, even though he said it was over?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure I follow your analogy. I just don't frankly know --

Q You remember the reference to the Battle of New Orleans?

MR. NESSEN: I remember the reference and the battle. (Laughter) I just can't help you on that.

Q Ron, I am troubled by what appears to be a direct inconsistency here between what the President said last night and what you have said here this morning. I hate to belabor the point, but the President in fact said Dr. Kissinger didn't have an input into that speech --

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, Bob. He didn't say that. What he was asked was, did he take part in the preparation, and the President said no.

Q Maybe that is the problem. Can you tell me what is the difference between having an input and not taking part in the preparation?

MR. NESSEN: He visits with the President every morning, as you know, and gives the President the benefit of his views, and their views are identical.

Q You mean he took part in the thinking, but not in the writing. Is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you the truth -- in an unprecedented move (Laughter) -- I am just not, as a matter of routine, going to go into the nuts and bolts of how speeches are put together.

Q That is the truth? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is the truth.

Q Ron, another apparent inconsistency, yesterday on the Hill -- if I could just shift for a second from Vietnam -- Secretary Morton testified that he is in opposition to the President's position on land use legislation.

This doesn't happen too often that a Cabinet member contradicts the President's views on something like this. Do you have anything on that?

MR. NESSEN: I do. The fact is that, point one, that any Administration official is free to speak his mind on any issues facing him in his role in the Cabinet or facing the Administration.

Actually, I don't know that there is such a big disagreement between the President and Secretary Morton because the President also believes in responsible land use legislation.

The President does not support land use legislation this year because it falls within his opposition to any new spending programs this year.

Q How about this other inconsistency on Vietnam that we have been around on a little earlier? You said there are matters to finish in Vietnam, and you listed a short agenda of what they are, stabilizing the situation and the evacuation procedures.

How can you possibly say that is not a modification or different over what the President said last night?

MR. NESSEN: It is not. That is why I say it.

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Q Those words, on the face of it, don't sound to you like a clear difference, something he says has finished?

MR. NESSEN: The speech, as I tried to point out, was a call on the country to shift its focus and to get on with this agenda for the future he talked about and listed, which is much the same thing he said in his foreign policy speech to Congress.

As I have told some of you privately, without very much success, the speech to Congress contained a section on Vietnam which at that time was, as you say, the agenda for the remaining things to be done in Vietnam.

Then, there was a dividing line in which he said, "But let us keep Indochina in perspective." And then he went on and listed many of the things he listed last night.

I have tried to point people in that direction without much success. But last night's speech followed right along the same lines of what he had done in that speech.

Q Ron, what makes the President's statement that the war is finished a valid one when, in fact, nothing has changed in terms of his requests for aid?

MR. NESSEN: I think you hit the very point, Dick. What has changed is that the President is calling on people to shift their focus.

Q So, it is a matter of rhetoric, rather than anything else?

MR. NESSEN: Let's not pick the speech apart. He said precisely what he wanted to say.

Q Is the Administration shifting its focus? It is not whether the people are shifting their focus. If the President means the war is over, why is he still asking for military aid? It is a question of focus, but a question of whose focus.

MR. NESSEN: I thought I had gone through the reasons he feels military aid is still needed.

Q You did, but I have serious questions about aid to stabilize the military situation. With 15 North Vietnamese divisions surrounding Saigon, what sort of military aid will stabilize the situation?

MR. NESSEN: I think I said the other day -- I think you were here -- that it is partly the aid itself, partly the perception of sending the aid on both sides.

Q How many South Vietnam divisions, combat ready, full strength, are ready to defend Saigon now?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to check the Pentagon on that, or your Saigon bureau. Secretary Schlesinger spelled out in some detail how the \$722 million would be spent in terms of re-equipping divisions, upgrading battalions and equipping the regional forces.

Q Isn't the President trying to have it both ways here, trying to create a new popular image that he is moving to a new atmosphere and a new mood and a new direction while still in substance standing just where he did before he gave his speech in New Orleans?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, if the President continues to ask for military aid because of the perception on both sides, what does he think the perception on both sides will be of his statement last night that the war is finished as far as America goes?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to check the two sides, Tom.

Q Is he not in danger of making a statement such as "peace is at hand" declaring the war is over, when at the same time he is asking, one, for military aid, and two, for the authority to use U.S. troops who may, if worst comes to worst, actually be in combat? Did he make that statement because he knows American troops will not be used, that is, because some negotiated exit is underway, or was he just using that as a statement of rhetoric that might come back to haunt him?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Which is it?

MR. NESSEN: Is it one of the above?

Q Would you explain how he can say the war is over at a time when there is still a possibility that American troops might be employed there?

MR. NESSEN: He said the war is finished as far as America is concerned. As I say, it was a call for the Nation to shift its focus to the other problems in the world today and the problems of the future.

Q Ron, if you are going to change the question around, if he is asking for authority to use American troops, more American troops might be killed and that is implicit in the request the President has made.

MR. NESSEN: I think I said earlier in another connection that he hopes there would be no need for the use of military elements for an evacuation.

Q He says the war is finished but, in effect, is he promising the people of this country that no more Americans will be killed or are those people likely to be killed in some other war?

Q Does he mean the war is virtually finished, is that what we are asking about?

MR. NESSEN: Is this really going anywhere that will help anybody write a story?

Q Yes.

Q Can you say whether the President more than hopes that American troops will not be required? Is he confident American troops will not be required?

MR. NESSEN: Why would I use the word "hopes" if I meant "confident," Mort?

Q He would always hope that.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the situation there in Vietnam is such that nobody knows what the next step will be.

Q If what he said last night does not mean we are changing our day-to-day, hour-by-hour policies or aspirations in Vietnam -- which is essentially what you said this morning -- does it mean at least the President would like at this point to stop talking about it? Is it a conscious effort on his part to lay it aside as a public issue, he will be making no more speeches relative to it, and he just wishes everybody would let it die as a public issue?

MR. NESSEN: All these offers of definition have been thrown at me today and it seems to me the President said what he meant to say. The war is finished as far as America is concerned. Let's get on with the agenda for the future. Those are English language words and they mean what they say.

Q What did you mean when you said, there are matters to finish in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I will go through them again. The matters to finish in Vietnam are to stabilize the situation, evacuate Americans and the South Vietnamese to whom we feel a special obligation.

Q So, the American role, as described by the President last night, is not finished?

Q Isn't that true, Ron, isn't what he said true?

MR. NESSEN: There was a question earlier on why the President is going on a Jetstar tomorrow. The answers are, one, communications on the DC-9 are not as good as they are on the Jetstar. Number two, for security, the Jetstar has four engines, the DC-9 has two engines.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:27 P.M. EDT)