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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:45 A.M. EDT

MAY 7, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You have the President's schedule for today.

As you know, he is in with Prime Minister Rowling of New Zealand now.

At 2:00 he will see Prime Minister Whitlam of Australia.

At 4:00 he will see Prime Minister Wilson and Foreign Secretary Callaghan of Great Britain.

There will be pictures, film, at the beginning of each of these meetings, and we also plan to have a brief report on each meeting when it is over.

This evening, as most of you know already from the schedule, the President is holding a Cabinet meeting on the SEQUOIA at 6:30. The plans to cover this are that a travel pool will follow the President to the Navy Yard, where he boards the ship.

It is the first time he has used the SEQUOIA since he has been President, and because of some interest in the event, there will be open coverage of the President arriving, boarding the ship and departing at the Navy Yard.

To get into the Navy Yard, your White House, Congressional or Metropolitan Police pass will be adequate credentials. The travel pool will I guess go to dinner during the meeting, and then will come back to pick the President up again when the ship returns.

Other than that, there seems to be adequate coverage.

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Q Are they going to have dinner aboard?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, a buffet dinner aboard, and I think Larry will give you the menu.

There is some interest in the SEQUOIA, and a fact sheet has been prepared, and it has already been placed in the press release bins, I believe. I don't really expect any hard news or decisions out of this meeting, and for that reason I planned not to give any report on the meeting until the morning.

Q Is it just a boat ride?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is a meeting, and if it would help any, I can give you an idea of the agenda now, if you would like.

Q Yes.

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Q Will you be there at the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I will.

The first item on the agenda will be a review of Congressional relations up to this point and a discussion of strategy for dealing with legislation in the period ahead. That is the first item.

Jack Marsh will speak first on that, after the President, and then each of the Cabinet members will be called upon to tell what his experiences have been with Congress up until now, and what his strategy is in the future for advancing legislation relating to his Department.

The President will outline some of his views on dealing with Congress after that.

The next item on the agenda will be the question of the refugees and there will be reports from Max Friedersdorf on the legislation in Congress, and from Jim Schlesinger on the actual situation with the refugees.

The President will give his thoughts on the matter which I think by now you are familiar with.

The next item on the agenda will be a discussion of the President's crime message. I think the broadest outlines of it were indicated in the Yale Law School speech. The timetable for that is sometime early- to middle-June for sending that to Congress.

The President will talk about some of his views which will basically be the same as his Yale University speech.

Frank Zarb, at that point, will then discuss the status of energy legislation and Russell Train will discuss, appropriately enough being on the Potomac, the water quality program. That is the agenda for the meeting tonight.

One of the purposes of having it on the SEQUOIA is to take a little more time. It is a fairly full agenda, as you see, and the President felt a trip on the SEQUOIA would give more time in an unhurried atmosphere to deal with some of these broader questions.

Q Does your research indicate this is the first Cabinet meeting ever, apart from the first time the President was aboard the SEQUOIA?

MR. NESSEN: I have not done that much research, Ralph. I do know it is the first time the President has used the SEQUOIA for anything.

Before he goes out on the SEQUOIA, the President will meet briefly with the Board of Trustees of the American Enterprise Institute and some of the key program people from that organization involved in the AEI study of public policy issues.

The group will be in there this afternoon for a series of briefings by Administration economic, energy and other officials.

I think you know that this is a continuing series of meetings bringing outside organizations in for briefings on these subjects.

The purpose of this series of meetings is to keep private organizations informed as to what the Administration is doing and especially to hear their views on some of these issues.

Q Is the President going to see them?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to see them briefly, right.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: It is late afternoon. I don't have the exact time.

Q Can you give us a list, Ron, of the organizations?

MR. NESSEN: That he has met with?

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Q No, that he is going to meet with today.

MR. NESSEN: The American Enterprise Institute is the name of today's group.

Tomorrow, as I think you already know, the President will meet with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, and also we will have a dinner in his honor tomorrow night. We will have more details as we go along.

Here is an event I don't think we have announced before.

On Saturday the President will participate in the Lee Elder Golf Tournament. That is to be held at the Lake of the Woods Country Club.

Q Where is that?

MR. NESSEN: In Locust Grove, Virginia.

Q What country club?

MR. NESSEN: Lake of the Woods. The name of the town is Locust Grove, Virginia. It is 17 miles west of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The President's foursome will include Lee Elder, Flip Wilson -- who will not be in drag for the occasion -- and Jim Wiechers, a touring pro.

Q Where is he from?

MR. NESSEN: He is a touring pro. I don't know that. The tournament is for the benefit of the Lee Elder Scholarship Fund, which benefits the education of students who are interested in golf. (Laughter)

Q Is that a joke?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is the truth.

Q Is he going to do anything after that?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible.

I don't expect any news to be coming out of the group down there, so I think the way we will handle it is this: Pappy will go down there ahead of time, or will be there to move a pool around, and the pool will be able to follow the President around the course, as was the case I think at the Jackie Gleason Golf Tournament. You remember that one.

Q What time is this?

MR. NESSEN: I am getting to that. Bill Roberts will go down with the travel pool on a helicopter. Other than that, I don't see any reason to have a press bus. If any of you care to drive down yourselves, we will have maps.

I do want to say this: If you are thinking of going down and you are not in the pool, the facilities down there are not great for caring for a large crowd. The parking and bathroom facilities near the tee area are limited. I mean, that is a consideration. The nearest food is a mile from the first tee clubhouse area, and there will be no formal press office.

Q Telephones?

MR. NESSEN: That is another problem.

MR. HUSHEN: We are trying to get some set up.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the pool will follow him all the way around. For those not in the pool, there will be open coverage on the practice tee, the first tee, the ninth green and the eighteenth green. The President will tee off at about 11:30.

Q Which hole does he blow his top on?  
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Only internally.

The credentials to get you in, if you care to go, are White House, Congressional or Metropolitan Police passes. The President is expected to leave the White House by chopper at 10:30 and be back by about 5:30.

Q And the press goes how?

MR. NESSEN: A pool will go down by chopper.

Q From here?

MR. NESSEN: I guess from the Ellipse. That is where the pool usually leaves from in a chopper.

That takes care of the golf tournament. Back by 5:30.

We have a little packet of minor announcements.

Q Can we continue on this Saturday? Will someone covering the President's golf tournament also be able to get to Camp David if the President goes?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President will come back here at 5:30, as I say, and whatever else he plans to do for the weekend he would leave from here.

Q He has an OAS reception, doesn't he, of some sort?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is possible.

Q Is that here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the details of what he is doing Saturday night. But anyhow, you will come back here. If he goes to Camp David, he will not go straight from the golf course.

Q When will we get the full day so we will know how to plan?

MR. NESSEN: Later in the week.

I have a little packet of minor announcements that will be available at the end of the briefing, very routine and technical Executive Orders, and that sort of thing.

You also have the Presidential announcement of two actions. One, by Proclamation the President is designating today, May 7, 1975, at midnight, as the last day of the Vietnam era and this terminates certain wartime benefits.

The President also is asking Congress to terminate GI Bill educational and training benefits for future veterans effective on July 1st.

Now, I want to make clear that none of this applies to anybody who is currently in the Armed Forces or anybody who has been in and has been discharged already. The two different actions apply to veterans, in the first case, wartime benefits.

The termination of those applies to veterans, to anybody who joins the Armed Service tomorrow or afterward.

The second point, asking Congress to terminate this on July 1st, applies only to people who join the Armed Forces after July 1st.

Now, do you have questions about that or is it self-explanatory? I am told the VA is cranked up to answer all your technical questions on this.

Q This does not effect benefits already being drawn by Vietnam era veterans?

MR. NESSEN: It does not affect anybody who is already in or who has been discharged already. It affects only people who join either after tomorrow in one case or after July 1.

Q What is the rationale for extending the benefits to people who will be volunteering, enlisting between now and July 1? These people are not being exposed to any wartime danger.

MR. NESSEN: That is the GI bill benefits?

Q Right.

MR. NESSEN: There has to be a cut-off date, and July 1 was picked as a cut-off date. Congress does need some time to enact this. As I say, the VA is prepared to answer your technical questions.

For those phone call fans, I checked and got some details on the reaction to the news conference last night, if you care to hear it. This is as of 11:00, about an hour ago.

First of all, I will give you phone calls. Reaction to the President's news conference. There were 167 phone calls of support or praise, whatever you want to call it, for the news conference, and most of those referred to the statements on Vietnam refugees as the reason for their praise.

And 125 opposed and again, most of the opposition also was to the refugee question. That is as of 11 o'clock. 167 favorable; 125 opposed. Telegrams, as of 11 o'clock: 207 favorable, 95 opposed, five with miscellaneous comments.

Again, most of them involved the refugees, although some of the telegrams dealt with gun control. I don't have a breakdown. To help you with the arithmetic, you add the telephone calls and the telegrams together, you get 347 favorable, 220 opposed and five miscellaneous. That is about what I have.

Q Ron, this gun control is the kind of thing that can draw a rather unspontaneous large response at any given time. Can you give us any guidance at all that the Vietnam thing, the refugees, outweighed the gun control?



MR. NESSEN: I think Larry talked to them. Bill's note to me says a few dealt with gun control. Most dealt with the refugee question.

Q Do you know why the President is against registration? I know it should have been asked last night.

MR. NESSEN: Last night's views by the President do not represent any change of the position he has taken for a long time. He will be sending a crime bill to Congress sometime in June, and I expect that that will deal with the question of handguns.

Q Do you know what his rationale is against registration? You register to fish, you register to do anything. What is the big problem on registration?

MR. NESSEN: I frankly have not gone into that.

Q It is not the NRA influence, is it, by any chance?

MR. NESSEN: I just have not explored the reasons for his opposition, Helen.

Q Ron, who in the White House is working on the crime bill or the crime message or is it all being done in the Domestic Council?

MR. NESSEN: No, the Domestic Council and the Justice Department.

Q Ron, with Attorney General Levi apparently having gun control as his primary aim, did the President's statement last night put him in conflict at all with the Attorney General?

MR. NESSEN: None whatever. As I say, the Justice Department and the Domestic Council are working on the crime bill and the gun control question.

Q You told us last night you might have a better explanation of what the President meant by closer ties with South Korea in the aftermath of Vietnam. Do you have anything in that connection?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a great deal, Helen. He has made similar statements in the recent past to Congress and in other public statements. He simply wanted to reaffirm the steadfastness of the American commitment.

We do have a defense treaty with Korea that was ratified by Congress, and he wanted to, I think, convey to South Korea and others the firmness of that commitment, and I think he probably also wanted to convey to North Korea the American intention to meet any attempts to raise tensions in the area.

Q I had several questions on that I wanted to raise with him last night. Perhaps you can be helpful. President Park has said he thinks South Korea will be the next trouble spot for the U.S. on the Asian mainland. Does the President share that view, And a follow up question, please.

MR. NESSEN: I don't really have much additional to give you on Korea, and I don't think the President is speculating on where trouble may or may not break out next. I have not heard him say that.

Q What about the honoring of the American commitment to Korea? Does he really the country or the Congress would honor the commitment which exists if there were aggression?

MR. NESSEN: That is a legal treaty ratified by Congress.

Q Ron, did the President go further than the Shanghai communique in his comment on Taiwan?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't think so. What do you mean, go further?

Q Did he take a firm position in support of Taiwan but it was not spelled out in that communique?

MR. NESSEN: No, he was expressing the fact that we value our relations with Taiwan, but I don't think he went beyond what he said before publicly.

Q Ron, in connection with that, in a recent press conference -- not the San Diego one, it was one of those in the South -- he was specifically asked if he was reaffirming the U.S. commitment in Taiwan, and he did not do so. He did not do so. He just sort of skirted that direct question and used more general language.

MR. NESSEN: You mean the defense treaty with Taiwan?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No. We maintain all of that commitment.

Q But he specifically volunteered that language last night and I wondered what the significance of that was.

MR. NESSEN: None.

Q Ron, did we have any communication with the PRC before that, any tip-off that he was going to speak in that strong a language?

MR. NESSEN: I disagree with any suggestion that there was any sort of policy shift last night in his statement.

Q Our people in Hong Kong are reporting that the Chinese diplomats are scurrying around with some little concern about the whole thing.

MR. NESSEN: Let me say flatly there is absolutely not any change in policy toward the People's Republic of China. The President continues to believe that normalization of relations with the PRC is a cardinal element of Administration foreign policy and he remains firmly committed to the Shanghai communique, which, as you know, sets a general direction on American policy toward the PRC.

Q Would he dispute reports that this in any way might jeopardize the trip?

MR. NESSEN: The President believes just what he told Congress on April 10th, which is that he looks forward to visiting the PRC later this year in order to seek ways to accelerate the normalization of relations with the PRC.

Q Isn't he asking for it both ways, really? I think our friend here can answer. On the question of the Shanghai communique, didn't we really say that we agreed that China has the sovereignty over Taiwan, basically?

Q No, we said both sides --

Q Ron, these questions have been asked in the context of the known Chinese position, that there will not be any great improvement in detente until the United States has done something about its commitments to Taiwan. That is a fact.

MR. NESSEN: The President has been asked that very question at least two or three times that I am aware of and I think what he has told you is he just does not feel it is profitable to speculate on that matter or to have a speculative discussion on the matter at this time.

Q But it is a fact, Ron, isn't it, that this is China's position often expressed in regard to commitments to Taiwan?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have answered your specific questions and hopefully dealt with the question that Steve raised. I don't think it is possible to go beyond that.

Q Isn't it a fact, though, Ron, since the Shanghai communique that no senior American officials, until Secretary Schlesinger brought it up the other day, have publicly flouted the American support for the Nationalist government and the treaties with them?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure I agree with your choice of words, Tom.

Q Forget flouted, but publicly stated the commitment to Taiwan?

MR. NESSEN: As I told Jim, we do have a defense treaty with Taiwan and the President remains committed to that. His choice of words last night was that he affirmed or reaffirmed whatever that commitment is.

Q Has that been done publicly except by Secretary Schlesinger and the President last night since the meeting between the Presidents here and when the Shanghai communique was issued.

MR. NESSEN: I am not that familiar with the total public record, Tom. I am not familiar with the total public record.

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Q Ron, American affiliated companies in Canada and Latin America are permitted to trade with Cuba and now ships that call in Havana are being permitted to call at U.S. ports. My question is: Does this represent to the President a possible wedge for broadening any trade and tourism agreements between the United States and Cuba?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not that well briefed on Cuban policy, John. I think you could get into a great deal of that kind of detail at the State Department.

Q But you know of no plans or negotiations going forward for possible diplomatic relations between the two countries?

MR. NESSE: I think what the President has said publicly the last few times he has been asked remains unchanged.

Q Ron, to go back to Asia a minute, the President seemed to be saying last night that the United States was going to work more closely with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations because he specifically mentioned Indonesia and the Philippines.

Two questions about that. One, I would like to ask what precisely he had in mind in view of the fact that Indonesia, which is pretty much the leading force in that association, is more neutral than ever as a result of the developments in Vietnam, and Indonesian leaders have made several statements re-emphasizing or re-enforcing their neutrality.

Secondly, what specifically is being done to increase or strengthen our relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

MR. NESSEN: Let me just start off, Jim, by saying that I am not sure your premise is correct. Let me say you should not read any significance into his mention of some countries and his failure to mention other countries because the ones he did not mention were encompassed by a remark that he made saying "other Pacific nations."

Q Does Thailand fit that description?

MR. NESSEN: I think the point of it all is that whatever particular words he used that Jim cites or that others cite, there was no intention last night to make any change in American policy.

Q Ron, the only omission of a nation that has had that pro-American policy and military involvement was Thailand.

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not mention Japan, New Zealand, Australia, whose leaders he is meeting today, and Malasia and Singapore.

Q I am not asking about omission of nations. That is not my question. My question is by mentioning Indonesia and the Philippines he seemed to be talking about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. They are the two leading countries in that association.

My question is, what are we specifically going to try to do to work more closely with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. That is the first thing.

MR. NESSEN: But Jim, you are basing that whole assumption on the fact he mentioned those two and didn't others, and that is why I say you are incorrect.

Q I am not talking about that. What I am saying is that he seemed to be saying we are going to be working closely with these other Asian nations that we have not worked closely with before. Let's see if we can put it that way.

MR. NESSEN: I just disagree with that.

Q Let's take it this way, then. Let's take Indonesia all by itself. He said he was going to work more closely with Indonesia. How is he going to do that in view of Indonesia's strength and neutrality, which they have been re-emphasizing ever since the Vietnam collapse, and what are the specifics he has in mind for working more closely with Indonesia?

MR. NESSEN: I, at this point, am unable to give you the details that you seek.

Q Ron, may I ask a question with reference to something the President said last night. He mentioned an informal meeting of Republican leaders this week, Dean Burch among them. I would like to know if that meeting has been held, will it be held today, and can you tell us when it will be held?

MR. NESSEN: Dean called me this morning and said it was being held at 11 o'clock in his office and that he intended to go down to the lobby of his office -- and I do not have the address here in front of me -- after the meeting and talk to reporters and that that word had been passed around by some member of his firm.

So, the meeting is in his office at 11 o'clock this morning, and he will talk to reporters afterwards.

Q Ron, would you be able to give us much of a report on the meetings with the three Prime Ministers?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a brief report on each one.

Q In line with my question yesterday, is the President not faced with new realities in the Pacific and as a consequence, are you saying the policy is the same as though Vietnam was still there?

MR. NESSEN: Didn't he say last night he was assessing American policy in the Pacific in the light of postwar period? I thought he said that in just about those words.

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Q How is he assessing it?

MR. NESSEN: For one thing, he is having meetings with leaders of Australia and New Zealand, and Singapore tomorrow.

Q Is this part of the assessment, then? Can we say that?

MR. NESSEN: I think we are in a period of assessment, Helen.

Q Ron, is Secretary Kissinger attending these meetings with him?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, Dean Brown indicated yesterday that the United States is not altogether happy that Australia is taking very few of the refugees. In these meetings today, is the President going to bring up the refugee subject and ask these countries to take more of these people?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it is not a scheduled part of the agenda, and I don't know whether it will come up or not, but the report we give after would indicate if it does.

Q Ron, apart from those meetings today, what is the President's reaction to the lack of cooperation by UN members in the third countries to take more of these refugees?

MR. NESSEN: I think Dean Brown gave a long list of countries yesterday. In fact, I think he said the United States had been in touch with over 100 countries, didn't he?

Q He said only one country was actively taking refugees and that country was Canada, and you said he was personally very disappointed.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard the President speak on this but Dean Brown said yesterday some of the French-speaking African countries had indicated an interest in taking in refugees.

Q Ron, is he satisfied with the reaction of the UN members and others?

MR. NESSEN: I have not asked him that, Bill, but I will check for you.

Q Ron, can I ask you about South Korea? I know you discussed it earlier, but I don't think you specifically answered the question of what the President wanted done in the way of strengthening ties, that is, does he want more money to be spent in South Korea or more American troops there or what did he have in mind?

MR. NESSEN: You had not come in, but he talked about making sure that South Korea does understand our defense treaty approved by Congress, and so forth. That we stand by that and affirm our commitment to it and also to let North Korea know how we would respond to any increased tensions.

Now, as for any steps beyond that, I cannot give you any details today.

Q Ron, I would like to follow this up. Apparently, the President seems to feel that South Korea is threatened in some way. We have always had these ties, as you know, and you cannot get into any specifics about what he wants done to strengthen them, as he said last night, and at the same time, he, in effect, linked South Korea with Taiwan by mentioning, volunteering, in the same paragraph, with recommitment to our defense of Taiwan.

Is he trying to warn the Chinese Communists that they had better not try to move against the South together with North Korea? Is that what is behind this?

MR. NESSEN: Let me straighten out one thing, first. Korea was mentioned in the same paragraph, as you say, only because it was a specific answer dealing with relations in the Pacific.

But to go beyond that, the President's understanding of the communique which was released at the conclusion of Kim Il-sung's visit to China was that China supports a policy of peaceful reunification of Korea according to the communique.

Q Did he have that in mind, then? Is that what he was referring to, the Kim Il-sung meeting in Peking and the new developments between North Korea and China, is that what he was really thinking about?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are examining these words a little too closely. I think he was stating general policy in these areas.

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Q You mean there is less here than meets the eye?

MR. NESSEN: I have a feeling we might see that in The St. Louis Post Dispatch.

Q Would the President favor renewed efforts to normalize relations between North and South Korea?

MR. NESSEN: I am not up to date on what the latest American policy is on that. For the kind of detail you are asking on Asian relations, you really need to talk to the experts at the State Department.

Q Can we ask this? Is the President asking the Commonwealth Nations in the Pacific for anything new in terms of bolstering defense spending?

MR. NESSEN: In these meetings today?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Why don't we wait and see what comes out of the meetings, first, Helen.

Q Does the President think any useful purpose is served by Senator McGovern's trip to Cuba?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard him talk about it one way or the other.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:25 P.M. EDT)