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N E W S  C O N F E R E N C E  #256

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:24 P.M. EDT

JUNE 26, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: At 8 o'clock this morning the President met with the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to brief them on the uranium enrichment bill that will be sent to the Capitol today,this afternoon. It is already there.

You had the briefing by Frank Zarb and Dr. Seamans and Bob Fri. You also have the message, the fact sheet and the summary.

Also, you had a chance to photograph the President and get a pool report on his signing of the message.

At 10 o'clock this morning, the President met with the new American Ambassador to Israel, Malcolm Toon, to give him his final instructions before he departs to take up his post. He was confirmed by the Senate on June 9, as you recall. They discussed briefly the Middle East situation in general, and Israel in particular.

At 10:45, the President greeted 50 participants in the 14th annual National YMCA Youth Governors Conference in the Cabinet Room. The group is in town for the week for a series of seminars on Government and energy. They were selected from among 15,000 young people who have participated in the YMCA's youth and Government program.

The President's remarks I think most of you heard or saw. The President was given an honorary membership in the National Society of Youth Governors by Gregory L. Rose of Escanaba, Michigan.

The President is meeting now with Members of Congress to discuss the restoration of military assistance to Turkey. The President plans to emphasize again his belief in the necessity for early action by the House to restore the aid to Turkey in order to avoid a possible long-term damage to United States relations with Turkey, as well as damage to American and NATO interests on the Southern flank of NATO.

The President has met previously with Members of the House on this same subject, on June 19 and June 23. The Members who are attending today -- have you got a list?

Q We have it.

Q What is he doing on this? I mean, is this sort of a final meeting? Is he making headway or what? They certainly know his point of view, so what is the purpose?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot provide you with any details of the meeting other than that they are working on the problem and hopefully toward a solution to the problem.

Q Can you go so far as to say that the effort is to come up with some kind of compromise rather than either the extreme of -- not the extreme, but either the option of leaving the embargo on or taking it off altogether?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would say they are working toward a solution, Jim, rather than the word "compromise."

Q Ron, is there any reason that this meeting was announced in advance, whereas the two previous meetings were not?

MR. NESSEN: There is no significance, no.

Q You don't know of any compromise plan that is being offered?

MR. NESSEN: They are just working on the problem, Helen.

Q There have been, of course, as you know, reports that they were trying to work out some kind of face-saving compromise. Are you denying those reports?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't have anything further other than that they are having another meeting to work on a solution to the problem.

At 4:15 this afternoon the President will see a delegation of the National Association of Arab-Americans. The group asked for this meeting to express its views on the situation in the Middle East.

The President has met with a number of individuals and groups during the course of his reassessment of the Middle East policy, and this is another opportunity for the President to hear the views of groups on the Middle East reassessment.

Let me give you some thoughts on the July 4 weekend so you can prepare for that.

On Thursday, July 3, a week from today, the President will travel to Cincinnati, Ohio. He will dedicate a new $30 million environmental control laboratory located on the campus of the University of Cincinnati and will meet with a group of environmentalists.

Q What kind of laboratory again, please?

MR. NESSEN: It is a $30 million environmental control laboratory.

Q What type?

MR. NESSEN: I will have more details as we get closer to it.

Q What does it control?

MR. NESSEN: The environment. (Laughter)

Q Federally funded?

MR. NESSEN: I will have more details as we get closer.

In the late afternoon, the President will close a White House Conference on Domestic and Economic Affairs at the Cincinnati Convention Center. Tentatively, the plan is for the President to speak at the dedication of the environmental center about 1 o'clock and at the White House Conference at about 3:30 or 4 o'clock.

Then the President will fly to Cleveland, where he will attend a Cuyahoga County Republican fund-raising dinner at the Cleveland Sheraton Hotel. That dinner will start at around 6:00 or 6:30, and the President will speak at about 7:30 and then will return to Washington that evening.

Q Ron, will that meeting at the convention center where he is going to meet with people, will that be considered a political meeting?

MR. NESSEN: The White House Conference?

Q Yes, will that be considered a political meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No, it will not.

Q Who is he going to meet with there?

MR. NESSEN: It is one in a series of White House Conferences that have been held around the country in which community and civic leaders meet with various Administration officials to give their views to the Administration officials on various issues.

Q On the fund-raiser, who will pay for the trip? Will the President's campaign committee have any share of the cost?

MR. NESSEN: No, the cost of the trip will be divided proportionately between the Government and the RNC.

Q Ron, does this rule out an appearance before the Young Republicans in Indianapolis?

MR. NESSEN: There is no such appearance that I know of.

Q What about July 4?

MR. NESSEN: On July 4, Friday --

Q On the 3rd, do you possibly expect the President to make an announcement?

MR. NESSEN: I do not expect him to make an announcement.

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Q Will he have made it before then?

MR. NESSEN: I do not expect him to have made it before then.

On Friday, July 4, the President and Mrs. Ford will go to Fort Mc Henry in Baltimore to participate in the sixth annual Our Country program --

Q In the what?

MR. NESSEN: Our Country.

Q Oh, I am sorry.

MR. NESSEN: -- sponsored by the National Park Service and the Federal Executive Board. We are going to find out what the Federal Executive Board is. Somebody was looking into that.

It is an evening program. It begins at 8:00 on July 4, in the evening. They have ceremonies which include 60 people becoming naturalized United States citizens, remarks by the President, and a fireworks display.

That is all expected to take until about 10:00, at which point the President and Mrs. Ford will go to Camp David for the weekend.

On Saturday, July 5, the President, as we have said before, will meet with President Suharto of Indonesia. I expect the meeting to be about the middle of the day.

There will be cameras and a writing pool in for photos, for the arrival of President Suharto.

Q At Camp David?

MR. NESSEN: Camp David.

Now, we are going to be losing some days because of the holiday coming up here and in order to get everybody cleared through Camp David, photographers and cameramen who want to attend should sign up with the press office by 4:00 next Wednesday, July 2.

We will be traveling on the 3rd and things will be pretty closed down on the 4th, so the names of photographers and cameramen should be into the press office by 4:00 next Wednesday, and then we will pick the writing pool after that.

Q Will we be allowed to cover anything at Camp David except for by pool?

Q Overall press arrangement?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Are you opening the press room there, or what?

MR. NESSEN: We have not really worked that far ahead yet, Ralph. We will, though, and you will need a place to file, certainly.

Okay. Now the announcements. These have not been handed out yet but they will be ready by the end of the briefing.

The President is accepting with deepest regret the resignation of Caspar W. Weinberger, as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, effective August 10. You will be getting the letter from the President and I will not go through it for you, but you will see that the President wishes Secretary Weinberger had remained in the Government, in the Cabinet, but expresses his understanding of Cap Weinberger's desire to return to private life after having served six years here.

To succeed Cap, the President will nominate Forrest David Mathews, the president of the University of Alabama. He is a distinguished educator, historian and civic leader, and the President feels that he will make an excellent Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

The President also is nominating today Burton Gordon Malkiel, of Princeton, New Jersey, to be a member of the Council of Economic Advisers. Dr. Malkiel is chairman of the Department of Economics at Princeton. He will succeed Dr. Gary Seevers, who is now a member of the new Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

The President also will nominate Walter J. P. Curley, Jr., of New York City, to be Ambassador to Ireland. He will succeed John D. J. Moore, who has resigned, effective as of the end of June.

Q Is he a relation or descendent or whatever you want to say, of James Michael Curley?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a biography here, Jim.

The announcements are already in the bins.

Q Ron, what is the political affiliation of Mr. Mathews?

MR. NESSEN: He is an independent.

Q He has been described as a Democrat.

MR. NESSEN: I know that. He is an independent.

Q Is that incorrect?

MR. NESSEN: That is incorrect. He is an independent.

Q When did he become an independent? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Well, you would have to ask him, but my understanding is that he has been an independent before his recent consideration for this job.

Also, the President is designating Gerald L. Parsky, who is the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, to take on a concurrent job as Executive Secretary of the East-West Trade Board. That will also be posted.

The President has asked Gerald Warren to represent him at the funeral of Eugene Pulliam, tomorrow, in Indianapolis. I think you all know that Gene Pulliam was president and publisher of the Indianapolis Star and News, the Arizona Republic and Phoenix Gazette, and the President held him in great regard and had seen him, I guess, twice in the past year.

Q Is he still legally a member of the staff?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is still legally a member of the staff. His resignation will be effective September 1.

This July 4 ceremony at Fort Mc Henry, I said, was jointly sponsored by the Park Service and the Federal Executive Board. The Federal Executive Board is a coordinating organization for various Federal agencies who are located in the Baltimore area. It is something like the Federal Regional Council.

There was a rather serious mistake made on some of the stories growing out of the President's news conference last night. The President stated no new policy on nuclear weapons last night.

There was a false premise in a question by Helen Thomas. The false premise in Helen Thomas' question was that "the United States has consistently disavowed the first use of nuclear weapons." That is not correct.

A search through the record shows the following: that on February 25, 1971, President Nixon in a report to Congress on foreign policy for the 1970s said: "Having a full range of options does not mean that we will necessarily limit our response to the level or intensity chosen by an enemy. Potential enemies must know that we will respond to whatever degree is required to protect our interests."

On March 18, 1961, President Kennedy sent a special message on the defense budget to Congress, in which he said: "In the event of a major aggression that could not be repulsed by conventional forces, we must be prepared to take whatever action with whatever weapons are appropriate."

General Goodpaster, representing the Nixon Administration, on June 29, 1973, talking to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy said: "In response to a" ---

Q Ron, you are going a little fast, here.

MR. NESSEN: This is not really for anything other than to set the record straight.

Q Yes, it is.

Q Is it possible for you to give us ---

MR. NESSEN: This is not really ---

Q Oh, yes it is.

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Q Can you give us a Xerox rundown?

MR. NESSEN: Let me go through this and then we will see how we can get these reproduced.

On June 29, 1973, General Goodpaster, in response to a question from Senator Dominic as to what would happen if there was a conventional attack in Europe which could not be contained by conventional forces responded, "I believe we would be confronted with the necessity to invoke the use of tactical nuclear weapons on at least a selective basis, if we were to prevent the rupture of our main battle positions."

On February 17, 1964, in the Administration of Lyndon Johnson, Secretary McNamara, testifying before the subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee on the defense budget, was asked by Mr. Mahon, "If the survival of the Nation is definitively threatened, we would hazard the use of nuclear weapons in order to prevent it, would we not?" Secretary McNamara: "Without question."

Five days later, Secretary McNamara, before the Senate Armed Services Committee says, "The President has made known our willingness to use nuclear weapons in defense of our interests."

Secretary McNamara the same day was asked, "Are such limitations on the use of our retaliatory forces now reflected in our official policy?"

"I can answer only by saying that we would propose to use nuclear weapons or any other weapons whenever we felt our vital interests require their use, Senator." And so forth.

We have not had time to check back to the Eisenhower and Truman Administrations.

Q Why did the President say it was a change?

MR. NESSEN: The President said there was no change. There was a change a year and a half ago, Helen.

Q Who stated that change a year and a half ago, and when did it occur and who was the author of it?

MR. NESSEN: Now, I think what we might want to do here is, those of you who want to file -- if there are any who want to --

Q Listen, let's don't shy away from this thing. This is very important.

MR. NESSEN: It is very important, and that is why --

Q You just made a change here against her. There is no inconsistency with her question and what you have brought out here. These three incidents that you brought out -- you brought out the word "aggression," you brought out "provocation," you brought out the fact that we would retaliate on something that happened to us.

That has been our policy all along, and so she asked a question here, have you --

MR. NESSEN: Look Sarah, we have a good deal of --

Q You made a wrong statement here in saying that that question was misstated. It was not.

MR. NESSEN: There was a false premise stated in a question to the President last night which resulted in an --

Q It was not.

Q The false premise was accepted by the President.

MR. NESSEN: Would you let me finish, Helen. There was a false --

Q You cannot just hit and run out here, you know.

MR. NESSEN: There was a false premise stated in a question to the President last night which resulted in some incorrect stories.

We can take a break here for the filing of corrections, if anyone wishes to do so, or we can go on.

Q Ron, settle this first.

Q Corrections are indicated, Ron.

Q You have charged Helen with a false premise, and I think Sarah has brought up the question that in each one of things you stated there was aggression by the enemy. I wonder if you would explain that, Ron, not hit and run.

MR. NESSEN: The President stated no new policy on nuclear weapons last night.

Q I think it was legitimate for her to ask him if he had a change in policy without making a misstatement.

Q Why did he say there was a change?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, we have done this for three or four or five days here.

Q Why did he say there was a change?

MR. NESSEN: The President told you, as I have told you here for three or four days, that a year and a half ago there was a change in policy which he indicated he had reviewed after he took office.

Q Could you explain that policy, Ron?

Q Who stated this a year and a half ago? There was no change a year and a half ago.

MR. NESSEN: Let's push on, folks. We are not going to get anywhere with this conversation.

Q That is not true, Ron, and you know it. It is not true and it has been admitted by officials in the Government today that that is not true, a year and a half ago.

MR. NESSEN: Some of you asked me the other day --

Q One other thing, if I may. I wonder if in the interest of completeness, and I am sure you are interested in completeness, and since those statements, of course, refer to response to enemy attack, if you would put out at the same time the frequent and numerous occasions on which Secretaries of Defense of the United States have disavowed any intention of the United States developing a first strike capability, which is quite different from what you are talking about.

MR. NESSEN: I am glad you pointed it out, Jim.

Q The premise, I think, of Helen's question --

MR. NESSEN: The wording of the question was, "The United States, as a matter of policy, has consistently disavowed the first use of nuclear weapons." That is a false premise.

Q That is not false.

Q Would you read the follow up?

Q Helen's whole question said something different.

MR. NESSEN: The only change the President did talk about last night was a change in tactics, which we have talked about here for some days.

To move on --

Q What is the answer to my question? Will you add to that record those frequent occasions on which the Secretaries of Defense have disavowed any intention of developing a first strike capability, regardless of what words Helen used for completeness?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I have a feeling that for the past three or four days we have gone around, and I have tried to explain that there has been no change in policy that a good number of us on both sides here have not really understood exactly what we were talking about, and I have the same feeling today, but I do know that you will want to correct any mistake for your readers and listeners.

The other day --

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Q Ron, if I may, on the point before you move on, Helen's follow-up question said, "You have not said whether you will use the first strike, in terms of tactical or strategic, and don't you think the American people should know?"

At this point the President basically repeated the position that he had said before.

Does the President at this point, I take it from what you have said today -- does he wish that he had made more clear just what he was talking about and that this was no change in policy?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q He is satisfied with the way he answered?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Then, why are you out here going through this?

MR. NESSEN: In an effort to point out the false premise in one question and the incorrect stories that resulted from it.

Q Does the President feel there was a false premise, or do you personally feel there was a false premise?

MR. NESSEN: Anyone who reads the question ---

Q Are you acting here under instructions from the President, or is this your own initiative?

MR. NESSEN: It is my own initiative, Jim.

Q The question was asked about first strike and it is also true that he did not disavow, as many Presidents and Secretaries of Defense have, I am sure, on occasion the intent to develop a first strike capability. Even when this change that the President was referring to, I take it that refers to the retargeting doctrine, so-called counter-force doctrine a year and a half ago.

Even at that time the official Government position was that this is not an intent to develop a first strike capability -- whether it is or not, that was the position. Does he still maintain that this is not an intent to develop a first strike capability?

MR. NESSEN: Helen asked him the question and he answered in the way that he preferred to answer it, Marty.

Q So he did not ---

MR. NESSEN: He made no new policy last night.

Q But he also did not disavow the first strike capability?

MR. NESSEN: The other day some of you ---

Q Ron, before we leave this ---

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Les.

Q Did the President -- I think Jim asked this ---

Q Did you answer the question?

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

Q Yes.

Q I thought I did.

Q I defer to Marty.

MR. NESSEN: My answer, if there was a question, is that the President answered the question the way he wanted to answer it, last night.

Q Marty is asking you, did the President disavow development of a first strike nuclear capability?

MR. NESSEN: The President made no new policy last night, Jim.

Q Ron, you know you are not responding directly. I take it you have a definite reason for it.

MR. NESSEN: I say again, folks, that most of us on both sides don't know what we are talking about, and we are talking about ---

Q We do.

Q I know what I am talking about.

Q You may be speaking for yourself.

Q We do.

Q I think there may be a false premise in that. I think I know what I am talking about. I mean, I am not mixed up in any of this and I didn't have ---

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would hope not.

Q You know, if you want to say you don't know what you are talking about, that is all right. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: All right. Let's move on.

Q No, I would like to clear this up just because you brought it up.

MR. NESSEN: Marty, I don't believe we are going to clear it up because the President gave the answer he wanted to give last night and he made no new policy last night, and I am not going to make any today.

Q Can you get us a statement as to whether or not the Government -- up until the President spoke yesterday the policy also stood that the United States does not ---

MR. NESSEN: I thought that was the question that Helen asked him last night, and the answer is the way he wanted to answer.

Q Ron, I am asking you a specific question. The policy stood, up until last night's press conference, that the United States doesn't intend to develop a first strike capability. Can you get us a statement, if you are not prepared now, in the future, on that?

Q I think one of the things that adds to this confusion, Ron, is that the President didn't respond by saying, "I am not going to say what we are going to do with our tactical weapons," which is what other Secretaries of Defense and Presidents have talked about.

He said we are not going to say what we are going to do with our strategic or our tactical weapons. When you talk about strategic weapons, those are the ICBM's out in North Dakota; that is, you are talking about a first strike capability.

So if there is some confusion that has developed here, that is part of the reason for that, and that is why I think it is a good idea to clarify it.

MR. NESSEN: I will look further into it.

Q Ron, I was wondering if you could tell us, did the President say that it was a false premise in the question of Helen?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I answered that when Jim asked me.

Q I didn't get your answer.

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you check the record? I think you will find later it was answered.

Q Could you repeat it?

MR. NESSEN: The other day some of you ---

Q What was your answer?

MR. NESSEN: My answer is that I did it on my own, Sarah.

Q And the President did not hold that ---

MR. NESSEN: I did it on my own, Les.

Q It didn't say that the President didn't, too, does it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The other day some of you asked me about Governor Connally's visit here.

Q Before we go on to that, I would like to ask you a question on this that I think is highly important. Did not the President make a mistake when he said a year and a half ago there was a change in our policy?

MR. NESSEN: There was a change in our tactics, Sarah.

Q Didn't he make a mistake, and if that change was made a year and a half ago, who stated it, because the President was not in office a year and a half ago, and who did it? And Schlesinger was not there then, either, I don't think. So who did it?

MR. NESSEN: Let me have the defense posture statement, please.

Okay. While we are waiting for the defense posture statement to arrive, some of you the other day were curious about the visit of Governor Connally, and I went off and got the information on the visit, but some of you had gone by the time I came back and in fact wrote before I came back, so I think we will go through it again so that everybody understands the Governor Connally visit.

He called here on the evening of the 17th of June. He was in town on some business, called quite late, and talked to Dick Cheney and said that he was in town and would be happy to drop in for a courtesy call.

It took until about 10:30 or 11:00 the next morning to arrange a meeting and to then relocate Governor Connally to tell him what time it was.

And he did come in at 1:12, I guess, and left at 1:45.

Bill Greener and Don Rumsfeld have both reminded me -- why don't you show this to Sarah because she has an interest in it.

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Q Why don't you tell us all about it? It is a valid question. It is very serious.

MR. NESSEN: Don and Bill Greener have reminded me that on the morning of the 18th I was in Don's office with Bill and Dick Cheney when Terry O'Donnell came in and said, "The Connally meeting is all set now." That had slipped my mind the other day when we talked about this, but to assure yourselves that I know some of the things that have gone on around here, I did know about the Connally meeting that morning and it slipped my mind.

To speak more generally, I think for a moment about these briefings, I --

Q May I ask a question on the Connally matter?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you tell us now whether or not Governor Connally assured the President he would have his support in the campaign next year?

MR. NESSEN: Bill, I think the President was asked what was discussed last night, and I think he described the meeting as he wanted it described.

Q That question was not asked him last night.

MR. NESSEN: It was a private meeting, and they discussed a range of subjects, and I don't have anything further.

Q Ron, about the White House guest policy, the AFL-CIO --

MR. NESSEN: I would like to go on and do this, Les, if you don't mind.

Q All right.

MR. NESSEN: Later you may.

Q All right.

MR. NESSEN: More generally, talking about these briefings, I said the other day that I thought some people at the briefings were too quick to charge or imply that there were cover-ups when there was no evidence of any cover-ups in the White House. I said I thought that that was poisoning the atmosphere of these briefings.

I want to add today that I think that some people here are too quick to make unsubstantiated charges or implications that I am lying or that my credibility has been destroyed.

I think this also poisons the atmosphere of these briefings.

This President has been in office for ten months now. I think that is more than enough time for this blind, mindless, irrational suspicion and cynicism and distrust to evaporate.

This President is an honest man, and he is a man of integrity and, as Press Secretary, I have kept the promise I made the first day I took this job. As I conceive these briefings, they are supposed to be for the purpose of me and you relaying information to the American people about what the President and the White House are doing.

I think in the present atmosphere, the briefings are not serving that purpose very well. I think readers and viewers are badly served and, in fact, are misled when suspicions are raised about everything said here when there is nothing to base those suspicions on except blind and irrational mistrust and the cynical thinking habits that have built up over the past ten years.

If these briefings are going to serve the public and, in fact, if we are going to continue to have briefings in their present form, I think the atmosphere has got to change.

For my part, I want to say that I hope that we don't have charges or implications that there is a cover-up of any kind or charges or implications that I am lying or that I have no credibility unless there is something to support those charges more than a vague and general suspicion.

Now, what other questions?

Q Ron, being that the President is such a popular fellow in the country --

Q We would like to have that whole statement, Ron, you understand. Can we have the whole thing?

MR. NESSEN: Just some thoughts of my own, Helen.

I think we ought to go on with the news questions now.

Q I would just like to ask you a question. I was wondering --

Q We need that, Ron. You have made a very important statement here, and I think we should have it to read it.

Q We all want it.

Q What I wanted to ask you was that the President being --

Q Are you threatening to end the briefing?

MR. NESSEN: Let's have some questions about the news.

Q Let's have some questions about what the statement you made --

Q What you just said is news.

Q What I would really like to ask you is that being that President Ford is generally conceded to be, I would say, one of the most popular men personally among reporters -- I personally can't seem to think of a single reporter who does not like the President personally -- what do you think has caused this business that you see as everyone thinking you are a liar?

You know, often the Press Secretary reflects what the President said. It seems that you had the feeling that all reporters have an entirely different view of you than they have the President. I wonder what caused that?

MR. NESSEN: I think we probably ought to use the briefing today to explore whatever news questions you may have.

Q You brought this up, Ron.

Q You are the one who broached it.

Q I have a specific question. Is there anything the White House can do as opposed to what the press can do to change what you have described as a poisonous atmosphere?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have done a number of things to improve the press set-up at the White House. As one of your colleagues is fond of saying, if people don't think that this Press Office is better than the last one, they have damn short memories.

That is not my saying that, that is somebody on your side of the aisle saying that.

Q Ron, does not your statement about the President being in office ten months and that is long enough to establish something sort of run contrary to fairly recent history?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean, Forrest.

Q It would seem that we would have learned something here when the Presidents have been in office for four years before we learned certain things.

Q I was wondering, I don't know that anyone has challenged the President's credibility. I mean, I have not noticed any serious challenge or that that has been raised as an issue.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so, either.

Q So, I just wondered, to what do you attribute this feeling that you have -- I was not really aware of it -- that you have that your credibility is challenged, that the people look on you as a liar? I mean, I had not heard anybody really raise that issue.

MR. NESSEN: I think maybe you missed the briefing where it was.

Q Ron, could we have this transcript early today? It usually takes four or five hours to get the transcript, and this briefing should be reported accurately.

Q Absolutely.

Q Ron, was the statement that you made in any way encouraged or suggested by anyone in the White House other than yourself, or was it discussed by anyone with you?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was not discussed by anyone or suggested by anyone.

Q Ron, would you deny that you are paranoid about this?

MR. NESSEN: I would, yes.

Q I was just wondering, do you think somebody is out to get you or destroy you personally?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You don't have that feeling?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q But you do have the feeling that you don't have much credibility among the folks here in the press room?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think if you go back and read the statement, Bob, you will see that what I am talking about is trying to get the briefings to the point where they serve their real purpose, which is to provide information.

Q But you don't seem to think the people believe what you have to say. That is the gist of what I got from your remarks there.

MR. NESSEN: I actually do want to deal with some of the news items today.

Q Ron, may I ask a question about this because this is very important. This is news indeed. We don't have a copy of your statement, so could I please ask -- as I understood it, there was an implied threat in your statement to discontinue the briefings.

Q By what authority would you do that?

Q In their present form.

MR. NESSEN: In their present form?

There is some consideration of revising the briefing procedure.

Q But aren't you paid by the taxpayers to come out here and brief us.

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q How can you change the procedure if we don't carry on a question and answer session?

MR. NESSEN: There are various ways. The briefings have been done in --

Q What is your present idea, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: We are in the process of discussing our ideas in the Press Office now.

Q Have you discussed this with anyone?

Q I thought you said --

MR. NESSEN: I said the possible change in the briefing procedure has been discussed for quite a long time.

Q But should that be done unilaterally? Shouldn't you meet with a representative group of the press?

MR. NESSEN: I have.

Q Ron, could you give us some idea of the kinds of changes you have been discussing?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just wait and will do that. As I say, we have discussed it with groups from the press.

Q Would you mind telling us who in the press represents us so that we may know who represents us?

Helen is the President, as I understand.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think anyone presents themselves in these discussions as representing anyone, but themselves. There are people who are interested in improving the briefings and restoring them to their original purpose.

Q Is this a threat, Ron, of censorship?

MR. NESSEN: No, it isn't.

Q It sure sounds like it.

MR. NESSEN: It is an effort to make the briefings serve the purpose, which is to provide information.

Q I am puzzled as to how you can change the procedure without altering, changing or abolishing the question and answer format.

MR. NESSEN: There have been all different procedures that have been used in the past. This is a fairly recent innovation.

Q What do you mean, fairly recent innovation?

MR. NESSEN: I mean, the briefings have been done in various ways in the past.

Q Such as?

Q Ron, I have been here for a long, long time.

MR. NESSEN: Come on, gang. I am going to start going through here and telling you what we have to say, if you are not going to ask anything about anything.

Q Ron, do you think that you should decide what subjects are brought up here? Is that what you are implying?

MR. NESSEN: Not in the least, Bob.

Q You keep trying to go on to the other things while we feel that this is important.

MR. NESSEN: This is a very parochial inter-room --

Q I think it is, too.

Q We feel it is newsworthy. Don't you think that we have a right to ask the questions that we want to ask?

MR. NESSEN: I am not stopping you, Bob.

Q Ron, isn't it a false premise to say that reporters shouldn't look for cover-ups? I mean, it is the duty of reporters --

MR. NESSEN: I never said don't look for them, Phil. I said don't charge or imply them on just a vague suspicion.

Q I wish once again you would cite the occasion on which reporters charged a cover-up, if you are referring to those questions on the screening of NSC material. The word "cover-up" was not used and no charge was made. I repeat, as I said before, those were factual questions. You, not us, were the person who used the word "cover-up."

The factual questions attempted to find out what the procedure was, who was doing the screening and what the mechanism was. Those are factual questions.

Q Ron, would you change the briefing format without consultation with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Possibly.

Q And we would go along with a change in the manner of briefing?

MR. NESSEN: There has been no decision to change it, Bob.

Q Just to reiterate, you did not discuss the statement you made today with anyone before you came out?

MR. NESSEN: I showed it to a couple of people on my staff about five minutes before I came out here.

Q But not to the President, or not with any other --

Q Do you think you can arbitrarily wipe out the questions and answers to the President every day through you?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know there were any plans to do that, Helen.

Q Do you think that every reporter in town can come to you individually throughout the day? You are not that available.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that we planned to do that, either.

Q You talk about eliminating the briefings and I think that is a serious threat.

MR. NESSEN: When was the talk about eliminating the briefings?

Q How about giving us your statement?

MR. NESSEN: I said change the procedure, to possibly change the procedure.

Q What are you considering, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think we kick this around a lot among ourselves, Bob, and with the people out there and see whether any change is needed and, if so, what it should be.

Q Ron, I would like to know, who are the people in the press? We have Helen as the President of the White House Correspondents to which we almost all belong. Who did you meet with? You didn't apparently meet with Helen to discuss this. You said you met with certain people in the press, and you say that we might change it. You don't tell us how you want to change it, you don't tell us who you met with. What kind of open White House is this, Ron? Could you tell us who you met with in the press?

MR. NESSEN: They were secret meetings that were not on the schedule, Les. (Laughter)

Q I am sure of that.

Q Ron, is it your feeling that the --

Q Are you going to release the statement that you read?

MR. NESSEN: I just hacked something out this morning.

Q This is a very significant, apparently official, statement on the part of the President's Press Secretary.

MR. NESSEN: It was a very personal statement on the part of the President's Press Secretary.

Q However it is, when you took that job, you became more than just Ron Nessen, obviously. You became the President's spokesman, and that is a statement from the President's spokesman about the nature of these briefings. It seems to me it represents White House policy, and that we deserve to have a copy of it.

MR. NESSEN: It represents some personal views of mine, Tom.

Q Ron, you read the statement out so quickly --

Q You have no personal views when you are talking about the press relations from that podium as the President's spokesman?

Q You read this so quickly that I think we are entitled to have a text of what you said so we can look at it and determine precisely what it means.

Q Would you read it again, Ron?

Q I think we are absolutely entitled to it.

MR. NESSEN: We will Xerox the transcript pages that have this statement on them.

Q Wait a minute. Why can't you make a copy of it right now?

MR. NESSEN: We will Xerox something and give it to you.

Q Ron, did you discuss with the President the suggestions that were made the other day that he take a look at the transcript of the briefing that dealt with the National Security Council minutes?

MR. NESSEN: He normally reads the transcript of this briefing every day.

Q In line with that, do you have any fear that when the President reads this transcript, that you might be fired?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, no.

Q Is your statement in any way a consequence of the President having read these previous briefing transcripts?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, you have said that you didn't discuss this statement except to show it to a couple of members of your staff. Have you discussed the problem, which you identified in your statement, with the President?

MR. NESSEN: He has kidded me about the briefings, and I think some of you have been present when he has done that.

Q No serious discussion?

Q That is the extent of it?

MR. NESSEN: We have not had a serious discussion.

Q What I don't understand, Ron, I don't understand why you don't tell us, is that there is generally an aura of good feeling in Washington, I think almost everybody agrees with that, between the President and the press. It is certainly much better than it was over the last five years, and yet you seem to feel that all of your credibility has been lost. To what do you attribute that?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are overstating it, Bob.

Q To what do you attribute this trouble? whatever this trouble is that you see? Who caused it? What is the fault of it? Where does it come from? Why would you feel compelled to make this announcement this morning?

MR. NESSEN: It was not an announcement. It was some personal views that I have shared, I think, with some of you in less formal settings -- for weeks, for months back, I guess.

As I say, the purpose of it was to make these briefings serve the purpose for which they are intended, which is to get news out to people.

Q Ron, what has caused them not to do that? I mean, what in your view?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, we are exploring it from our side, and I assume others will explore it from their side.

Q Ron, is it your feeling that the blind, mindless, irrational cynicism you speak of is directed toward you personally, or directed toward the President?

MR. NESSEN: No, no, I don't think it is directed to me personally -- I hope not.

Q Is it directed toward the President?

MR. NESSEN: I hope not.

Q Well, to whom is it directed?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, come on, Russ. Look, there is a lot of news today, and we have --

Q We are not sure what you are talking about.

MR. NESSEN: I am happy to talk about it, and I have talked about it to lots of you folks privately and in bars and in my office and homes and so forth. I have no problem talking about it, Russ. I don't conceive of this as a news story. I conceive of it as my personal views that I thought I wanted to express for the purpose of getting these briefings to the point where they are serving their real purpose.

Q You don't think that a threat to change the style of the White House news briefing, and your human declaration here is news?

Q Or a feeling that you think that we think you are lying?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I don't know where the threat was that you see, but ---

Q That is, and that is the way it is going to be written.

MR. NESSEN: I am sure it will be.

Q Ron, is there a briefing tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know. (Laughter)

Q Ron, is the White House looking into the fact that the Commerce Department approved export licenses for crude oil which apparently resulted in a substantial windfall for one oil producer and apparently cost consumers considerably more in the purchase of oil?

MR. NESSEN: Okay. I don't know the details of the charges involved but, which case -- is that the Carey case?

Q Yes, the Carey-Sparkman case.

MR. NESSEN: The Carey-Sparkman case -- I don't know the specifics of the charges except that I know that both the FEA and the Justice Department are looking into it and the President knows about the two investigations and is content to have those two investigations get to the bottom of the matter.

Q What about the Commerce Department? Is there any inquiry going on over there?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any.

Q Ron, to follow up on something the President said yesterday. Asked about the possibility of an OPEC price rise, he used pretty strong language and among other things said it would have a devastating impact and would be totally unacceptable.

Then there was a follow-up question, "What do you mean unacceptable? What could the U.S. do?" And the only thing he gave in the way of an answer was saying, "Well, we are coordinating more closely with our partners in the International Energy Agency," but that is sort of a long-term thing.

Is the President considering any specific short-term responses, should OPEC raise their prices this fall, or is there anything we can do to prevent that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, one thing the President, I thought, stated clearly last night would be to get started on an energy program.

Q But that is a long-term thing, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: There can be fairly rapid reductions in imports but ---

Q The word "unacceptable" means we will not accept a price increase. Does that mean that we would not import Middle Eastern oil if they raised the prices as they have threatened to do? Is that what the President is saying?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is what he was saying, Tom. I think he was just saying that we would find it unacceptable; we would find it unjustified.

Q The President said "unacceptable" and he repeated it several times, and he said it before. Is that an overstatement of what he means?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think it is. We would find that unacceptable and unjustified because we don't feel that the economics of the case justify any price increase at all.

Q Can I ask a question on that?

Q The fact is that we would live with it.

MR. NESSEN: Well, we would have to if we don't -- well, I should not say that we would have to. As he said, we are taking joint steps with other oil-consuming countries and he is urging Congress to pass an energy program to avoid the dependence on imported oil and the fact that other countries can arbitrarily set the price or cut the supply.

Q OPEC countries are scheduled to meet, as you know, in September, to discuss a price increase.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Will there be any effort on the part of our Government to meet either collectively or individually with the members of OPEC to use any diplomatic means that are at our disposal to try to dissuade them from raising the price?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know that there has already been some steps toward a dialogue between the consumers and the producers. There was the preparatory session in Paris which the United States is anxious to have resumed.

Q Ron, if I could follow up on my earlier question, is the President aware that as recently as March and May of this year people in the White House played a role, at least as an expediter, in the applications for these export licenses?

MR. NESSEN: His feeling is that it is being investigated by the FEA and the Justice Department, and that while the investigations are going on that he would just prefer not to comment on the individual allegations; that he is confident that these investigations will find out what, if anything, happened.

Q Ron, if I may go to another subject, the AFL-CIO has got as its guest speaker next week Alexander Solzhenitsyn. I am wondering, has the President entertained Mr. Solzhenitsyn, or does he plan to in the manner that he has entertained the Soviet flyers?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans to do that, Les.

Q He has never entertained Solzhenitsyn?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I recall.

Q He has never been here?

Q Ron, does the White House have any reaction to the events in India over the past 24 hours?

MR. NESSEN: Only that it is an internal Indian matter, Walt.

Q What does the White House think of the Indian intention to censor foreign press dispatches, including American press dispatches?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that they had. I will check and find out for you.

Q Ron, if I could try just once more on this matter of the OPEC price increases being unacceptable, the Times here has the President saying, we would have to "find some answers other than OPEC oil."

I just want to be sure I understand that. The President is not contemplating some immediate switch-over to other sources should OPEC raise its prices this fall, is he? I don't want to leave that dangling.

MR. NESSEN: Well, not that I am aware of.

Q Also, Ron, there was a story on the Cronkite show a few nights ago about Ethiopia -- I don't know if you saw it -- but it reported that the United States is presently exporting considerable grain to Ethiopia to help with the famine and yet the Ethiopians are in turn selling, exporting grain at the rate of 12,000 tons last year.

Is the Administration at all concerned about this?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't even hear about that story. I will look into it for you.

Q I have already looked into it at the State Department and called the Ethiopian desk and they have confirmed it exactly as I have given it to you. Would you get me some sort of answer on that, please?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, has the President decided on the last dollar?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is reserving judgment on the last dollar.

Q Ron, do you have anything to announce on Arthur Sampson resigning?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q What about the economic indicator?

MR. NESSEN: They are just about in line with what was expected.

Q Ron, can you shed any light as to why the President was so angry over a news leak in Israel over an Israeli proposal that was thought to be erroneous in the first place?

MR. NESSEN: What is that, Joe?

Q This is the statement that came out of the State Department yesterday.

Q In the President's name.

Q In reference to competition and leaks.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that the President was personally angry about that, Joe.

Q Who was? Somebody was.

Q Didn't Anderson say he was?

MR. NESSEN: Say that the President was personally angry about it?

Q That the President had instructed him to make that statement.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think that is probably right.

Q Well, can you give us any more background as to how all this came about, that the President made a statement like that through the State Department about a leak by an Israeli source?

MR. NESSEN: I think the statement spoke for itself probably, Bill, and I cannot add anything to it.

Q Was there anything brought up about this in a meeting this morning between the President and the new Ambassador to Israel?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't sit in on the meeting.

Q You have not any more than what you already said?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Ron, is it your impression that the President in his answer to the first question at the press conference yesterday afternoon, the one having to do with first strike capability and intention, do you happen to know whether he thought that he was changing in any way the past posture and policy of the United States on this point?

MR. NESSEN: No, he knew he was not changing it. I told him ahead of time that I thought he would get a number of questions on that so he was prepared and did not intend to and in fact did not make any change in the American policy.

Q You didn't answer my question a while ago as to whether or not he didn't make a mistake.

MR. NESSEN: No, he didn't make a mistake, Sarah.

Q Ron, when he was discussing the oil increases as being unacceptable, he seemed to suggest that the OPEC countries might be hurting themselves because there were going to be alternativeforms of energy found if they did that.

He seemed to suggest that there might be an alternativeform closer than most people would realize. Do you know if we might be close to any kind of a major breakthrough where foreign oil might not be that important to our --

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think that was really the thrust of what he was saying. He was talking that this would harm the economies of Western Europe and Japan and would especially harm the economies of the lesser developed countries, much more so than the United States, and that by this worldwide effect on the world economy, that it would hurt the OPEC countries themselves.

His indication of substitutes and so forth I know did not foreshadow dramatic breakthrough in an energy source.

Q What was the reason that Mr. Mathews was chosen, President Mathews? What were some of his attributes in selecting him as the HEW Secretary? Did it have any political connotation at all?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. He is an extremely energetic man, an able administrator, and intelligent. He has dealt as a civic leader in some of the areas he will be dealing with at the HEW, and the President thinks he will make a very good HEW Secretary.

**THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.**

END (AT 1:19 P.M. EDT)