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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:32 A.M. EDT

JULY 10, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: Fran wanted to know when we were going to put out the new revised White House staff list. I am told that it is incorporated in the Government Organization Manual, which went to the printers on July 1 and will be available about August 1. So, that is done.

I don't think we have any additions to what we posted at ten o'clock.

You heard Senator Scott and Congressman Anderson on the Congressional leaders meeting this morning.

Q     What time will you have the bible for the trip, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Joy is typing her fingers to the bone, and I think by the end of the afternoon, certainly.

The texts for the trip tomorrow are not doing well, yet.

Q     How about a text on this mayor's meeting, the two o'clock mayor's meeting?

MR. NESSEN: That is doubtful.

Q     How about the bible on Helsinki?

MR. NESSEN: There is no Helsinki trip.

Q     There is no trip?

MR. NESSEN: Not at the moment.

Q     Do you expect anything soon?

MR. NESSEN: They still have issues to resolve, and no date has been set for the trip.

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Q Ron, have any CIA spies infiltrated the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to some people about that today, and I think you can say very flatly there has never been any penetration or infiltration of the White House by a CIA agent --

Q How do you know? (Laughter)

Q That is different from employee.

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish the rest of it, and that will clear that up.

-- any penetration or infiltration of the White House by the CIA. Any CIA employees at the White House are here on duty or on detail, or were here with the complete knowledge of the White House.

Q You said or and were. Which do you mean?

MR. NESSEN: I said that any employee of the CIA who is on detail or on duty at the White House is or was here with the complete knowledge of the White House.

Q How about the President?

Q Are you talking about the Ford White House?

MR. NESSEN: All White Houses.

Q The White House is, after all, a building. It does not have knowledge in and of itself. Was the President aware?

MR. NESSEN: The President and a lot of other people are aware. It shows up on the payroll.

Q You don't call it penetration or infiltration if you know the man is here?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Who is the man on the staff now who is CIA, and who was the man under Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: As I read the story, and I think what raises the question, is some idea that there was an agent here hiding under a cover and nobody knew he was an agent, and so forth. That isn't true. It is not true now. There are people on duty or on detail to the White House from the CIA.

Q What sort of jobs do they hold?

MR. NESSEN: People who work, for instance, with the NSC.

Q Are they confined to the NSC staff or might they be in other roles?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any other roles by any other CIA people. Which ever ones are here are here quite openly, and everybody knows it.

Q What are their names?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the names.

Q How many are here, would you say?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Can you get their names?

MR. NESSEN: I will check in and see.

Q Do they report back to the CIA what goes on in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I think we are making a mountain out of a molehill.

Q Who are they accountable to?

MR. NESSEN: If they are on detail to the White House--I think we have gone through this so many times before in relation to other people from other agencies--that when somebody comes on detail to the White House, he reports to his superior in the area to which he has been detailed.

Q Do any of their functions include reporting back to Langley on the day-to-day activities of the President or his staff or the White House itself?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, no.

Q How do you know this goes back to the other Administrations? Did you get this information from the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: From various people in the White House.

Q Who are they? Can you tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't get a rundown of who they were, Tom.

Q Who are the people that told you there were no CIAs?

MR. NESSEN: Let me say before this gets out of hand, this is barking up a non-existent tree.

Q Before we establish the tree is existent or non-existent, why don't you tell us who planted it?

MR. NESSEN: Who planted the tree?

Q Yes. (Laughter)

Q Did you say how many there are?

Q If there is no tree, I think we deserve to know who assured you there are no agents there.

MR. NESSEN: Various people in the White House and elsewhere.

Q Was the President one of those?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Are the CIA people experts, that come here because the White House wants them?

MR. NESSEN: Of course. I mean, look, lots of you know about the detail process in the Government and you know in order to get a detailee you have to request a detailee. Nobody forces a detailee on you.

Q Ron, there was an FBI agent under the Johnson Administration, which is most unusual. You don't have any FBI agents down here now, do you?

MR. NESSEN: There has always been an FBI agent at the White House.

Q In the Oval Office?

MR. NESSEN: No, the President does not share his office with an FBI agent. He did get a guy in to investigate that fly yesterday, but he was not with the FBI. He was with Orkin. (Laughter)

Q Leaving all jokes aside, Ron, all the laughs and all the jokes aside, we did have an FBI agent in the Oval Office during the Johnson Administration. What does the FBI agent or CIA agent at the White House do now?

MR. NESSEN: Let's not get the two mixed up.

Q They go along together. They are both being investigated by the same committee on the Hill. So I think this is pretty important.

MR. NESSEN: Let's do this a step at a time. There is a resident FBI man here because, as you know -- and has been as far back as I know -- because there are a good number of personnel appointments. There is no secret that people appointed to Government jobs have an FBI check on them.

Q That is no secret but that doesn't require an FBI man at the White House.

MR. NESSEN: That is your judgment. The judgment of the people in personnel is that it helps speed the process.

Now, as for the ---

Q Is that his only duty?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, his only duty so far as I know.

Q He has enough work to keep him busy full-time?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there any NSA cryptographer here?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, these reports of CIA activity at the White House prompt the people that you talked to to make a check?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. In fact, the first time I called around to find out, they said we are checking around and will get back to you.

Q Were any around during the Watergate scandal?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I don't know what went on during that period.

Q How long have the CIA agents been detailed to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q How long are they here? What do they do?

MR. NESSEN: They do various things.

Q Did this check go back the full 28-year history of the CIA?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how far back the check went, but it was far enough to assure themselves that any CIA people who worked at the White House who were on detail or on duty were here with the full knowledge of the White House.

Q Are you convinced the Congressman who let this story out simply misunderstood the role of the CIA people here at the White House?

MR. NESSEN: That is possible. I have no knowledge of where their information came from or what it is.

Q Did anybody try to find out what is going on, why these people had this story?

MR. NESSEN: My responsibility, I thought, was to look into what I anticipated would be a question and get the answer to it. That is what I did. It wasn't my responsibility to go and find where the House Members got their information or misinformation.

Q Are you convinced in your own mind that all CIA agents who ever worked at the White House have done so overtly?

MR. NESSEN: I am convinced now and as far back as has been checked that has been the case.

Q Ron, to use journalistic parlance, can you be sure there are no CIA stringers in the White House? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Can you be sure there are no CIA stringers in the press corps?

Q No. (Laughter)

Q Are they only attached to the NSC or are they in domestic surveillance?

MR. NESSEN: There is no domestic surveillance in the White House.

Q Well, there was before.

MR. NESSEN: I am not responsible for what went before.

Q How far are you checking back when you are issuing this blanket denial?

MR. NESSEN: My blanket denial is that anybody who works at the White House from the CIA on detail or on duty is here with the full knowledge of the President and the rest of the White House--on the payroll records, for goodness sake.

Q Does that include the possibility of someone being an employee of the White House, of the President, and providing information to the CIA while not in a CIA agent status?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, my question was only half joking to Howard. I have no knowledge that there is any secret agent in the White House. In fact, I have been assured there is not.

Q And never has been, you said.

MR. NESSEN: As far back as the people checked who talked to me.

Q If you read the Rockefeller report, you have instances where Helms would tap former CIA employees who are no longer with the CIA. I think it was one of the Post Office officials. He would just finger him and say we need this and this and this. This is what I think Jim is getting at.

Can you guarantee any of the White House people who used to work for the CIA are not still siphoning information back?

MR. NESSEN: Can you guarantee they are?

Q That is not my job.

MR. NESSEN: No, but it is difficult to prove that kind of negative, Walt.

Q Did you take in the whole Nixon Administration?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to look and see how far back my information goes.

Q If it is difficult to prove in the negative, how can you make such an adamant statement?

MR. NESSEN: Because I believe the people who told me.

Q Who told you?

Q Can you give us some idea of who they are, Ron?

Q That must have been a fairly cursory check because the report was just put out yesterday and you found out quickly this morning.

MR. NESSEN: I do spend my mornings trying to dig up information.

Q I understand that, but what I am saying is the check as to whether or not there has been any CIA activity here, it must have been rather cursory because it was done during a 12-hour period, less than that, in working hours.

MR. NESSEN: My notes don't show I have an answer to the question as to how far back this check went, but I can just simply say flatly that there are no CIA agents working in the White House in any sort of undercover or hidden role.

Q You said are none, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I say there are none. I am told in the past that there never have been.

Q By whom were you told?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really think that I need to go into the sources of my information.



Q The thing is how authoritative can anybody say "never" here when you have a whole new Administration? You have very few Nixon holdovers and so forth. On what basis? Ford wasn't here either to make a flat statement.

MR. NESSEN: This is what I have been assured, Helen, and I believe what the people told me.

Q Did the CIA provide the assurance?

MR. NESSEN: Various people provided the assurance.

Q Ron, I am not sure whether you said CIA agents were here in a capacity other than the NSC. Can you answer that directly, and can you say how many CIA agents are here?

MR. NESSEN: I think I said earlier I cannot say how many CIA employees are here, Russ. I think the word "agent" is misleading. They are here, at least one works with the NSC here, and there may be a handful of others who work in related capacities.

Q Could you be more specific on that, Ron, in related capacities?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Russ.

Q Are there any in the press office?

MR. NESSEN: I have been a little suspicious of a couple of people in there.

Q Have they been suspicious of you?

MR. NESSEN: Everybody is. (Laughter)

Q I am puzzled by the flatness of your statement.

MR. NESSEN: We have about six more minutes. Are we going to devote the whole briefing to this topic, which is not going to go any further than it is now?

Q I would just like to ask you as to your conviction here. You say, "I can just state flatly there are no CIA agents working in the White House in an undercover capacity, and I can assure you there never have." The Watergate investigation showed this E. Howard Hunt, who was then an agent of the CIA, had an office in the in the White House and was on the White House payroll. How can you give us that kind of assurance in light of that fact?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying people who come to the White House to work, their background is investigated, as I mentioned to Sarah in another connection, by the FBI. So, people's background who work in the White House that may have worked for the agency at one time or another, that is known.

Q Ron, why are you reluctant to tell us who besides the President assured you of this?

MR. NESSEN: Because I dig up a lot of stuff every day and this is the forum for information to come out in response to questions.

Q Ron, we have had cases in the past where people assigned to various agencies have reported back to those agencies about the activities going on in the White House, particularly the Defense Department reporting back to the Pentagon. Is your disclaimer here --

MR. NESSEN: My disclaimer here is what --

Q Does your disclaimer here include CIA agents assigned here, not going back and giving details to the CIA of information that they have access to in their jobs here, not taking into consideration attending meetings and relating what discussions go on in the Oval Office and secret sessions?

MR. NESSEN: Ton, there is no way I can know what every single CIA employee ever assigned to the White House ever did, and I don't think there is any way for you to know, either. The question was, are there any undercover agents working at the White House. I said no, a flat no. I can't find any way that I am going to be able to convince you or ever have the information on some of these other questions.

Q How about elsewhere in the Executive Branch?

MR. NESSEN: It is also true elsewhere in the Executive Branch.

Q Ron, does the President have any reaction to the stories that were written as a result of Bo Callaway's remarks that there seems to be a lot of space between the President's campaign and the Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: There is absolutely no space between the President, his Vice President, or his campaign director, and the clearest proof of that is Vice President Rockefeller, himself, the man involved, who would feel any space if there were any, said yesterday -- and I talked to him again this morning -- that he sees eye to eye with Bo Callaway. Bo Callaway understands, is completely in line with the President's stated position, so is Rockefeller, and all three are completely together on this.

Q On what, that Rockefeller is not being promoted by Ford?

MR. NESSEN: Promoted in what way?

Q Politically.

MR. NESSEN: How do you promote anybody more than when you say that the President is convinced that both he and Rockefeller can convince the delegates individually and as a team that we should be nominated?

Q Are we going to see Callaway today?

Q Callaway said there was no team, that they were on separate teams. I think that is an exact quote.

MR. NESSEN: There is no difference between the President, Bo Callaway and Vice President Rockefeller on this, period, and Rockefeller said so himself.

If the man involved feels that there is no problem --

Q He has no choice.

MR. NESSEN: The Vice President is known to speak his mind. Do you think he was lying when he said he saw eye to eye with Callaway? I want to ask Walt that. I think it is important to clear this up in your minds.

Do you suggest when the Vice President said he saw eye to eye with Bo Callaway he was not telling his true feelings, or what?

Q Let Walt have a news conference later and you can answer that. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Will it be available for film and tape? (Laughter)

Q Ron, there seems to be, though, still some differences --

MR. NESSEN: There are no differences.

Q I am not going specifically to your statements --

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. Anybody who wants to go the the regulatory agency meeting needs to go now. The President will speak in five minutes.

Q In an interview that David Broder had with the President, he asked him whether he would nominate Rockefeller after he was nominated, and the answer, as I recall, was that he would assume he would. Further, when asked about the ideology of Rockefeller, he said Rockefeller was a moderate, just as he was a moderate, as I recall.

Yet, I was in the conference with Callaway yesterday and I thought Callaway was saying he was viewing Rockefeller as a liberal and I thought he was also indicating there was no assurance at all that this would happen, that Rockefeller would be nominated.

I thought there was a little difference between what the President said to David Broder and what I was hearing from Callaway. I said so to Callaway and he said he wasn't familiar with the David Broder interview. So, I read it back to him over the phone after I got back to the office, and he said that is very interesting.

MR. NESSEN: All I can tell you is there is no difference between the three men and the best proof I can offer is the fact Rockefeller says there is no difference.

Q Can we get a picture of the President and Vice President together?

MR. NESSEN: He is coming at five for his regular weekly appointment. He comes in every week, and it is not normal to photograph them together.

Q Did you ask the Vice President whether he would campaign with the President?

MR. NESSEN: We have some damned good veteran political reporters in this room. When was the last time that there was -- let's be sensible about this-- campaign committees for the President are campaign committees for the President. Who is Jackson's Vice Presidential nominee?

Q Do you recall Richard Nixon cutting off Spiro Agnew or his campaign manager saying this is a campaign only for Richard Nixon and we are not going to be doing anything in behalf of Spiro Agnew?

MR. NESSEN: However you want to toy with the words, the fact of the matter is they agree with each other, all three men do.

Q Will Rockefeller be campaigning for Ford?

MR. NESSEN: He said yesterday yes.

Q If the President said they are a team, and Callaway said yesterday they are not a team -- if that isn't a different ---

MR. NESSEN: Bo's news conference rambled over two hours, as I understand it. My understanding of the context of that was, is this office an office for the team, or something like that. And all the people here who have covered politics for a long time know that is not the way things are done.

As I say, who is Jackson's running mate? Who is Udall's running mate? That is not the way you run for the President of the United States.

Q I have never yet seen a sitting President who has ever opened an office and run on his own with a sitting Vice President. You say it is always done that way. It has never been done that way.

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't the Committee for the Re-election of the President and the Vice President, was it?

Q Sure, of course. For a sitting President and Vice President you always have a team office set up.

In 1956 when they opened up Ike's headquarters on Connecticut Avenue, it was Eisenhower-Nixon.

MR. NESSEN: The President wrote this statement himself and it contains precisely what he feels. And Bo Callaway understands, agrees with, and approves of, and is totally in line with this. So does Rockefeller.

The line is, "I am confident that we can convince the delegates individually and as a team that we should be nominated."

Q Ron, does the end of that statement say it will be up to the delegates?

MR. NESSEN: No, the last line of the statement is, "I am confident both of us can convince the delegates individually and as a team that we should be nominated."

Q Ron, he made the statement it would be up to the delegates; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, Peter, I don't say anything out here -- except once -- that doesn't reflect the President's views.

Q Rumsfeld said that statement was contained in the President's statement that you read out here. I am simply trying to set the record straight.

MR. NESSEN: When I was asked the question, I responded that the President is confident both he and Rockefeller will be nominated, and then somebody asked me something and I said it is, of course, up to the delegates as always.

Q But it is not in the statement?

MR. NESSEN: Not in the written statement of the President. It reflects the President's views, however.

Q To complete that, we then asked you whether that additional statement you had made -- I want to complete the record here -- I was here and we asked you whether that additional statement you made reflected the President's views, and you said absolutely.

MR. NESSEN: And I say absolutely today.

Q Ron, when do the President and Vice President start convincing delegates as a team, and what is going to be the vehicle for that if the President Ford Committee is not the vehicle for them to operate as a team?

MR. NESSEN: Jules, it is going to work this year as it has worked in every political campaign I have ever been involved with; that is, as I think the President said one day, the delegates will make the decision. And whether enough of them have made the decision before the Convention or after the Convention starts, you know what the format is for obtaining delegates.

Q Ron, Bo Callaway also said that the President had made no firm commitments to Rockefeller to run as his Vice President. He said it in virtually those words. Is this indeed the case?

MR. NESSEN: The case is that the President's statement stands. Callaway endorses it, approves it, understands it; so does Rockefeller. There is no difference between the three men.

Q He may endorse it and approve it, but that is not what he said.

MR. NESSEN: What he said lasted for two hours and to pull out words he said in the course of two hours and try to have that stand as his total view is wrong.

The point to keep in mind is that the Vice President knew what Callaway said and said, "We see eye to eye."

Q In your view, or the President's view, did Mr. Callaway misspeak or was he misinterpreted in what he said?

MR. NESSEN: Apparently, the Vice President didn't think he misspoke and neither does the President.

Q What does the President think about what Mr. Callaway said?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever Mr. Callaway said was in line with the President's statement.

Q The President thinks that?

MR. NESSEN: What are the words again that came out of a two-hour news conference?

Q He said it in several different ways. He said, number one, Rockefeller would hurt the President, among Regan supporters. He said, number two, that the President had not endorsed Rockefeller as his Vice President. That seems to me to be at variance with what the President has said.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the context of any of those were. It was a long news conference.

Q You are talking about it, Ron, and saying there is no difference. How can you say that?

MR. NESSEN: There is no difference.

Q How can you say that?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to all three people involved and all three people are totally agreed on the President's views about the Vice President, which hasn't changed.

Q Does the President consider the statement he made as an endorsement of Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: I think the words speak for themselves, Peter.

Q No, they don't, because there is confusion over it in Callaway's mind.

MR. NESSEN: There is not confusion over it in Callaway's mind.

Q I am asking you, does the President consider the statement an endorsement?

MR. NESSEN: The statement is the statement. The President wrote it himself and it says precisely what he wanted to say.

MORE



Q Ron, would you ask the President if he endorses Rockefeller for his Vice Presidency and could we have a statement on it tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so, Bob, because I talked to the President about it this morning and this is his statement.

Q Does the statement not endorse Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: The statement is the statement, Peter.

Q In his statement, the President uses the word "team," he and Rockefeller are a team. Mr. Callaway specifically used the words "they are not a team."

MR. NESSEN: I guess we are starting around the same track the second time, so I will say what I said the first time.

Q Are they a team or not a team?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is the question related to an organization, the offices, the committee and so forth. Clearly, like Jackson, Udall, Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy, Eisenhower, the President runs for renomination.

Q I was at that news conference and the context in which he said it was in going after delegates "they are not a team." They were not talking about suite 916. They were talking about going after delegates as a campaign committee, weren't they?

Q No, he said, "I will not go to a delegate and ask him to vote for Ford and Rockefeller."

MR. NESSEN: We can't, for 16 months, and sit here and rehash everything that Bo Callaway says. I think what we need to look at --

Q There is going to be more, huh? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Jim, are we going to toy with words or toy with meaning? If we are toying with meaning, the meaning is that Bo, and the Vice President and the President are totally in agreement on this.

Q Are there any CIA agents in the campaign committee?

MR. NESSEN: I am not responsible for that.

Q Callaway is the President's political spokesman, right?

MR. NESSEN: He is the chairman of the President's campaign committee.

Q He will be speaking on his behalf in the political arena?

MR. NESSEN: He will, and whoever he hires as his spokesman.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 11:03 A.M. EDT)