

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#273

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:30 A.M. EDT

JULY 17, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: Let me give you a couple of little last-minute additions to the schedule.

The President is going to go out of the White House -- Mary McGrory, welcome back. She has been out looking for coverups.

Q Tell us about that, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Let's start again.

Q Why is she back?

Q There are no coverups here.

MR. NESSEN: Let's start again on the official record here.

Q No, leave it on the record.

Q It is on the record.

MR. NESSEN: I guess it is.

The President is going to go out about 2:00 this afternoon and drop in at a meeting of the directors and board members of a private social service organization named Service Employment Redevelopment/Jobs. This is a social service organization that benefits Spanish-speaking Americans.

They are having a meeting over at the Quality Inn near the Pentagon. They have an annual meeting, and the President was invited and decided to go and make some brief remarks.

He will leave, as I say, at about 2:00, and will be back at about 2:40.

MORE

#273

It is a very small place, and what we would like to do is to take a travel pool. Obviously, you are free to go, but frankly it is an extremely small place and it is going to be very difficult for more than the pool to get in. My plan would be for the pool to come back over here and give a pool report on the meeting.

The other event that has been added to the schedule -- and I don't have a precise time on this -- is the President is going to make a telephone call to the astronauts this afternoon from the Oval Office. That will be at 3:30. There will be a pool television camera in there.

In the interest of keeping the clicking noises down, I would like to be able to just take the AP and UPI still photographers in, if they have any interest, and a pool of writers, to go into the Oval Office. We will give you the exact times when we get them, but that is the general plan at the moment.

Q Is this the two crews together?

MR. NESSEN: It is. My understanding is that the two Americans and two Russians will be together. One American will be left behind in the main capsule at that time.

Q Which extension will he call, Soyuz or Apollo?

MR. NESSEN: Suppose he calls and they say it is not a working number?

Q I am serious.

MR. NESSEN: I think his communications are hooked up to the American capsule.

Q So he will talk to the one astronaut?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think there is a way they can all really get in on the conversation.

Q Does the President speak any Russian?

MR. NESSEN: The President does not speak fluent Russian. (Laughter)

Q That is why he has not met Solzhenitsyn. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You know about the Turkish aid meeting this morning. There is not a lot to tell. It lasted an hour and 45 minutes. It was in the State Dining Room. The President spoke, as did Secretary of State Kissinger and Defense Secretary Schlesinger.

Other people there included the Vice President, Under Secretary of State Sisco, Bob McClosky, General Scowcroft, Jack Marsh, Max Friedersdorf, Dick Cheney and myself.

The Members numbered 130. It was pretty much a cross-section, I would say, of the membership -- Democrats and Republicans. None of the top House leadership were there. There were some committee chairmen there. Obviously, Doc Morgan, the Chairman of the International Relations Committee, and Bill Broomfield, the ranking Republican on that committee, were there.

It basically followed the same pattern as the previous meeting on this subject, in which the President outlined his strong feeling for the need to lift the ban on military sales to Turkey. He and Secretary Kissinger and Secretary Schlesinger all said they preferred the Senate bill, which is simply a lifting of the ban, but they all indicated that they would accept the compromise which was drafted by the House International Relations Committee.

Q How did he indicate that they would all support it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Who is that?

Q You said they all indicated they would support this.

MR. NESSEN: No, no. I said the President, Kissinger and Schlesinger all said those three favored the Senate bill but would accept the compromise drafted by the House.

Q Is that the compromise that we heard out here?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. Basically, it would release the goods that the Turks have already paid for that have been held up in this country. As I told you, the Turks are even being charged storage fees. That would be released.

They also would be allowed to buy additional military equipment within certain ceilings. There would be no grants or anything like that allowed.

There are two other provisions, one requiring certain aid to refugees or attention paid to refugees on Cyprus, and the other, I believe, requiring certain reporting every 60 days to Congress by the President on progress in the Turkish-Greek negotiations about Cyprus.

I think you know the President's main points, and we went over those rather thoroughly after the previous meeting.

Q What was the date of that previous meeting?

MR. NESSEN: July 9.

Q Ron, was there any mention this morning of the Turkish Foreign Minister's votes with the other Moslem countries to expel Israel from the United Nations?

MR. NESSEN: It was mentioned somewhat casually in passing as a possible indication of what the President has been warning about, which is that if this country -- which occupies a very important place in NATO and, in addition to that, has installations on it which are vitally important to America's own security, and occupies a critical place between the Soviet Union and the Middle East, and is historically a friend and ally -- if we treat that country the way we have been forced to by this Congressional ban, then this vote that they took could be a first sign of a possible pulling away by Turkey from its historic friendship with the United States.

Q Who made that point? The President?

MR. NESSEN: No, no.

Q Who did?

MR. NESSEN: I forget -- one of the Administration spokesmen. I think it was probably Dr. Kissinger.

Q What did the President say about the negotiations concerning the status of the American bases?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that Ambassador Macomber, who you know, and Sarah knows quite well, is meeting today with high-ranking Turkish Foreign Ministry members at the request of the Turkish Government. I don't have any further details on the meeting.

Q This did not come up at the breakfast meeting?

MR. NESSEN: It did not, and I was a little surprised it didn't, but it did not.

Q This is the start of the negotiations today?

MR. NESSEN: It is my understanding, but you really need to check the State Department for what it is precisely.

Q You mean in Turkey, don't you?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, has the President spoken at all on the threatened expulsion of Israel?

MR. NESSEN: I think Secretary Kissinger has reflected the President's views that we would strongly oppose the expulsion of Israel, but more generally, I think both the President and Secretary Kissinger have voiced their very strong views that they are opposed to the expulsion of any country from the UN for narrow partisan or political or punitive reasons.

Q Ron, back to Turkey. Was there any discussion of the narcotics situation?

MR. NESSEN: There was basically the same discussion as last week. It was raised by Congressman Rangel and one or two others, and the President explained that under the new system in Turkey the government tightly controls the disposition of the opium crop, and that we feel that this is an adequate method for preventing the illegal ---

Q Is that the reason why so much of the opium is coming over here, the government controls it so well?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have an answer to that, Sarah, but it was discussed in that context this morning.

Q Did Dr. Kissinger at this meeting this morning give his explanation he had given before as to how this aid could be restored despite the violation of American law by the Turks?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think we went around quite extensively on this last week. It was not mentioned quite as much this week as it was at the previous Congressional meeting, but again, his views on it were that you need to look at the entire history of the conflict on Cyprus to understand the legal questions, and that in any case the legal question is cloudy and ambiguous.

Q Did any of the Members of the Congress at the meeting raise the legal question?

MR. NESSEN: They did not in my hearing.

Q Did they raise any other questions?

Q What is the nose count now on whether or not you are going to get this bill through the House?

MR. NESSEN: You know that it has passed the International Relations Committee, last Friday, by a vote of 16 to 11. I don't know that anybody has a very good head count on how it will do when it gets to the House Floor.

Q Did any of the Members raise any other objections, make any points?

MR. NESSEN: There were questions asked, but generally there were no ---

Q Do you recall any of the questions asked by anyone?

MR. NESSEN: There were some questions about how could we be so sure that there would be progress made on Cyprus negotiations if the ban was lifted or modified, and the answer given was obviously there is no way to guarantee success or progress in the negotiations but one way to guarantee no progress is to continue the ban on arms.

Q Did anyone raise the Vance-Ball position for the lifting of the ban on arms, that it ought to be tied to the progress on the Cyprus negotiations?

MR. NESSEN: That did not come up.

MORE

Q Are other meetings planned now with additional Members, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I believe there will be one other meeting. There were 140 Members at last week's meeting and 130 today, and the rest of the Members who have not had an opportunity to hear this presentation will be invited in for one more breakfast.

Q When will that be?

MR. NESSEN: The reason that everybody was not called in together was simply the seating limitations of the State Dining Room.

I don't have the date of the next one, but clearly it will have to be soon because the vote is coming.

Q Ron, when you answered my question I think about two weeks ago on the Snyder amendment, you said, "The President will not negotiate any treaty with Panama or anyplace else relinquishing basic American interests."

Now, the question is, you didn't specify what these interests are, but Bo Callaway has. I am wondering if the Callaway statement on Panama expressed the President's feelings.

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the Callaway statement.

Q I have it right here.

MR. NESSEN: I kind of thought you would.

Q "There is a widespread feeling that Teddy Roosevelt helped the Panamanians get their independence, paid for the Canal Zone, paid off France, conquered yellow fever and brought their sole economic enterprise -- we paid for it and it is ours."

Q Are you for or against Teddy Roosevelt?

Q No, that was not my question.

MR. NESSEN: The President went to see a movie about him.

This matter, Les, has been negotiated now under -- I guess the negotiations have gone on through three Administrations and they are continuing. I don't know that I can add very much to --

Q Well, does Callaway express what the President's feeling is about the interests that you mentioned?

MR. NESSEN: I believe the President can express his own feelings on the interests of the United States there or anywhere else.

Q I realize that. He has not mentioned Panama, has he?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean in a public statement?

Q Public or private or anything. Ron, I just want to know, when you say the American interest and you don't spell it out, and Callaway does spell it out, I want to know, does Callaway mention what the President feels on this rather sensitive issue?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather have the President speak for himself on the Panama question.

Q So would I.

Q When do you think he will, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, the matter is in negotiation.

Q It has been in negotiation so long that we have just about had -- we did that through the Johnson era and now we have gotten much further along.

MR. NESSEN: I thought I expressed at least the overall view when I did tell Les the other time that the President is not going to negotiate away American basing rights there or anywhere.

Q It looks like that then, he is going to go against some of the results of some of the negotiations that have already gone through. He will be at variance with Dr. Kissinger then, won't he?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q It looks like there is a difference here.

Q Does he agree with the Senate and the House or does he agree -- I mean, at least one more than a third of the Senate have resolved against relinquishing any of the --

MR. NESSEN: I thought I said that the President was not going to negotiate away. I have said that several times. The negotiations are being conducted in consultation with Congress, as always. If and when any agreement is reached, it would certainly be submitted in the proper constitutional manner.

Q What do you have for us on the Helsinki meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely nothing, Jim. I think you all know that the preadvance party did leave yesterday on the possibility that there will be a meeting there, but there is still no agreement at Geneva on a treaty to sign, and I have not got a thing.

I do have a couple of brief notes here. There have been two meetings today, and I guess we didn't make clear whether there would be photos and film allowed, and I am told there would be.

At 12:30, the President is meeting with six Senators, Hugh Scott and Hubert Humphrey as the leaders. They visited the Soviet Union in late June for a week and they met General Secretary Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders, and they are coming to give the President a report on their trip.

If you want to take some pictures at the beginning of that meeting, you could. It is at 12:30.

Q Ron, why not all of these Senators who went on that trip? Why not Pete Domenici of New Mexico, a good Republican?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how the group of six was selected, Sarah.

Q How many went on the trip altogether?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the briefing paper on that meeting.

Q Will they be coming out to talk to us later?

MR. NESSEN: They could, I think, if you would like them to.

Q It looks like if he can have 130 people for breakfast on the Turkish aid, he could have all those people down on this visit.

Q Could you ask whether they could come out in the briefing room?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, before we get too far away from Helsinki, this meeting -- I think it is at four o'clock this afternoon -- is this going to have anything to do with the decision?

MR. NESSEN: Which one is that?

Q The meeting with all these people who were former heads of the SALT negotiations.

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not aware that that is connected to the SALT agreement.

Q Where is the advance party going?

MR. NESSEN: To the CSCE agreement.

Q I mean, do you know anywhere else?

MR. NESSEN: Helsinki, as far as I know. I don't know what other stops.

Q Vienna?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Also at 5:30, the President is going to stop in at a meeting sponsored by the Vice President in the Cabinet Room. It is a group of scientific leaders who are meeting to discuss the research projects for the future proposed by the Office of Science and Technology Policy. The President is going to stop in, and if you want to have some pictures of that, you could. Also, we will take some photos into those meetings.

Q Ron, when will the President have time to meet with Solzhenitsyn?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have anything new to give you on a meeting with Solzhenitsyn, Sarah.

Q Ron, I would like to follow this up. I think we were all very impressed when you first came in here and you stated, "I will never willingly mislead the press."

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q For a whole week we were told all kinds of explanations as to why the President could not meet with Solzhenitsyn -- a dinner date, a previous engagement, a heavy schedule -- and finally it now comes out Dr. Kissinger admits that he advised the President. In fact, there is a memo reported.

Ron, are they deliberately withholding such information from you? I mean, you promised you would never mislead us, and yet, Ron -- (Laughter)

Q Speak to us, Ron. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I will, since I have had that kind invitation.

Q Answer yes or no. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Nothing I said the first week in terms of the President's crowded schedule on the date that was proposed was in any way misleading and when I was asked about Dr. Kissinger's role, I readily told you that yes, of course, any visit involving a foreign visitor or anyone whose time with the President would involve foreign policy implications, Dr. Kissinger and the NSC staff are asked for their views and they were given..

Q I also recall asking you if the President was worried about the effect it would have on United States-Soviet relations, and you dismissed that suggestion.

Q Would you say you have not misled us on the whole rationale for the President not seeing him?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, no decision here is based on simple grounds, one or two reasons. They are made on a wide range of reasons, and this is just the same.

Tom has asked me about his question. I don't recall precisely what my answer was to that, Tom, but I would stick by that answer that the various considerations that went into not seeing Solzhenitsyn on the one date proposed, I think it would be fair to say that any effect on relations with the Soviet Union was not a factor in not being able to find time on that one particular date.

Q Now Kissinger says that the overriding concern, or at least a very strong suggestion, is that it would have been disadvantageous to the United States to have had that kind of a meeting.

MR. NESSEN: Again, Tom just to sort of give you a little background on how decisions are made here, various advisers are asked for their suggestions, and that was Dr. Kissinger's view and others had other views.

Q You would not want us to walk out of here with the impression that Dr. Kissinger's view did not prevail in this instance, would you, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to know how to answer that, Tom. The original question was, could the President meet Solzhenitsyn on June 30, and he could not.

Q Because of a crowded schedule?

MR. NESSEN: Because of the crowded schedule.

And then the issue never really arose in terms of a specific meeting because no other specific date was proposed by anybody.

Q Ron, I raised the question myself and I did not mention a specific date, and a specific date has never been mentioned by you as being the reason he could not meet with Solzhenitsyn until today.

MR. NESSEN: No, no.

Q I think if you go back and look at the record you will find that it was a discussion of the general idea of meeting with Solzhenitsyn.

MR. NESSEN: Right, and I don't believe we ever said that the President would never meet with Solzhenitsyn.

Q Well, when is he going to do it? He has a schedule here today of trivia, absolutely terrible events here today. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think probably some of the people coming in would disagree with that.

Q These things are ridiculous, Ron; for the President to take his time and his energy and his health to meet with all these silly groups is ridiculous. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I thought the complaint was that the President never got to see enough real people who would talk to him about real problems.

Q These people are not going to talk to him about real problems.

Q Ron, regardless of the President's schedule, though, looking back on it do you feel that the answers you gave us on all of the questioning about the Solzhenitsyn visit were the best answers, and you wish that you had answered them in different ways now?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by the best answers. I am thoroughly convinced that what I said was in each case the truth of the matter.

Q Ron, to go to this original question that was first asked, as to whether or not you misled us in the first week or so of questions about Solzhenitsyn, it is the case, is it not, that at no time did you tell us that Secretary Kissinger had recommended specifically against the President meeting with Solzhenitsyn?

MR. NESSEN: No. What I did say was that yes, Secretary Kissinger had been asked for and made his recommendation or suggestions, and that I didn't feel it was proper to relay the private advice of an advisor to the President. I talked to Henry about that this morning and he said, well, he had felt free yesterday to go out and tell people what his advice had been.

Q Does the President subscribe to the analysis of the situation that Kissinger gave in Minneapolis and Milwaukee yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, the President gets advice on various matters up for a decision from various people, and he then chooses a course of action. I think it is important to keep in mind that when he chooses a course of action it should not be looked upon as accepting or rejecting or downgrading or upgrading any individual who gave him the advice. I mean, I think the object should be -- and I think you would agree -- for the President to get as much advice from as many people as possible.

Q Yes, but this does not answer the question, though. Does he agree with what Kissinger said yesterday? He said Solzhenitsyn was a threat to world peace.

MR. NESSEN: The fact of the matter is that the President would be pleased to see Mr. Solzhenitsyn, and that is where it is.

Q When did he get pleased?

Q Why didn't you say that when the question first came up, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Because, John, I think the question came up in a much narrower way, which was could the President see him that night or the previous night.

Q No, that is not the way the question was asked, Ron. As Pierpoint points out, he made it as a general question.

Q You are changing the record. If you will go back and look at the record, it had no relation to a specific date or time.

Q And also the question about the effect on Soviet-American relations was not narrowly put, as well, and what you are suggesting here today is that the President did not take Kissinger's advice into consideration.

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean he did not take it into consideration? He certainly did, as well as all the other people who gave him advice on the matter.

Q But the day that we asked you about that you said it was not a factor.

MR. NESSEN: It was not a factor in the President not seeing Solzhenitsyn on the one date that had been proposed.

Q If he would be happy to see him now, why doesn't he invite him?

Q You failed to say that there had been a single date proposed and that they were having a schedule conflict on that single day. You said that they would not see him generally because of a crowded schedule and a very general description of a crowded schedule; not because there has been a proposal that we meet with him on June 30 at 8:00 p.m., and we have that booked.

Q And you added that the President would like to have his meetings have consent.

Q Substance.

Q Ron, maybe you regret that word. The suggestion is that Solzhenitsyn is too light a weight for this intellect atmosphere.

MR. NESSEN: That really was not the suggestion, Mary. The suggestion was, as I say, a lot of people gave the President a lot of different advice on this, as they do on every issue, and there was a feeling that it would be better for the President not to do things as gestures or for their visible effect, but rather for the substance of the visit.

Q Ron, why do you fly in the face of the facts on this issue?

MR. NESSEN: Well, what do you want me to say? Shall I immolate myself right here? The fact of the matter is --

Q Let's take a vote. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Can we have a show of hands on that?

Q No, Ron, don't immolate; just confess. It would be so effective, Ron, really.

MR. NESSEN: What shall I confess, Les, that would make you happy?

Q I knew that Kissinger advised him not and, gee, it was controversial so I didn't tell you.

MR. NESSEN: Do you want me to tell you what I knew and when I knew it?

Q Yes, I would like to know that.

MR. NESSEN: The fact of the matter is the matter has been resolved and the President says he is pleased to see Solzhenitsyn. Why do we need to --

Q Why doesn't he invite him?

Q There is a lasting question here of how you treated us and you treated that question that goes beyond the Solzhenitsyn-Ford meeting and our inquiries about it, and that is what we are raising as well.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

Q And that has not gone away, by any means.

MR. NESSEN: I feel in reviewing the record that I was forthcoming as to the situation at the time.

Q Let me just shift to a little broader issue here. The Secretary of State says that he considers Mr. Solzhenitsyn's views something of a threat to world peace, or something or other to that effect. Does the President of the United States share that view?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard the President use those words.

Q Ron, isn't it true that the President originally decided that it would not be best to see Mr. Solzhenitsyn because of reasons concerning detente, but since then the President has had a change of heart and that is why you can now tell us that the fact is that the President would be pleased to see him? Is that accurate?

MR. NESSEN: Is that the confession?

Q No, that is my question.

MR. NESSEN: Oh.

Q Your confession may come now, but that was my question.

Q There are no surrogates in confession, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I have heard that.

Q Good for the soul, too.

Q Good for the soul, as Helen says.

MR. NESSEN: Let's see. The question is, did he not want to see Solzhenitsyn the first week or so because --

Q Did he originally decide that it would not be a good idea to see him because it might affect detente, and did he subsequently have a change of mind and decide that he would, after all, be pleased to see him?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would say that I would quibble with that in the sense that I don't think any really solid decision was made initially. There was a decision made not to see him on the one date proposed, and no other dates were proposed, so the matter never really came up in that form.

Then the President felt by Saturday or on Saturday that he wanted to make it clear that he would be pleased to see Solzhenitsyn.

Q Let me follow that, please. My question dealt with a reason for the first conclusion, as well.

MR. NESSEN: I think there, as every decision here, there were a variety of reasons.

Q Including detente?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know all the factors that went into the lack of decision the first week or so.

Q Because all we ever heard from you was that the reason was that he had a busy schedule and there is this other reason as well now.

MR. NESSEN: I thought I made clear that Dr. Kissinger had been asked and had offered his views, and that the President had them, and I didn't say what the views were but I think most of you somehow knew what they were.

Q Well, Ron, didn't you on Tuesday, in answer to a question from John Lofton, say that -- he asked a question as to whether he didn't have time to see him on a particular date and that the same answer applied to the whole of the following week. You did say that.

MR. NESSEN: And it was true.

Q Well, why don't you say that this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I am trying to say that.

In the form that it came up the first week or so it was a question of -- well, my answers were that there was not time on his schedule, which was right. That was one of the factors.

Q Through the whole of the following week, you said, right?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the point, John, is that nobody came in here and said, can the President see Solzhenitsyn on such and such a date. It never came up after the initial date proposed.

Q I think there is more storm than substance here but --

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would have to agree with you, John.

Q -- I agree with Tom and others that you are claiming to have been candid in a way that you clearly were not.

Q Ron, it has been three weeks almost since this question was asked. Is it possible that the policy has moved on and changed somewhat since then, and that your answer at that time corresponded to your knowledge at that time?

MR. NESSEN: I have tried to say that. Maybe I ought to pull all my answers together. I thought I had said this at various points.

Maybe the points to keep in mind are, one, that there was a specific date proposed for a visit and it was not possible for the President to see him at that time.

The other questions that came up that week, I answered in light of the circumstances at the time.

Third, as I told Marty, there was no really specific decision one way or the other to see him or not to see him because it never came up in those two weeks.

Finally, on Saturday, a solid decision was made that the President would be pleased to see him.

Q Why did the issue come up on Saturday if it had not come up before then?

MR. NESSEN: Because the President anticipated being asked about it at his news conference and felt that he needed to reach a decision in order to answer the question.

Q Ron, is the White House now trying to arrange a meeting with Solzhenitsyn or not? Or is the White House simply waiting for Senator Helms or Senator Thurmond to come in with a new proposed date for a meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think a specific invitation has been issued.

Q Is the White House trying to arrange some sort of a meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think I will just leave it that the President will be pleased to see him.

Q Ron, that means that they are, does it not, Ron?

Q Jack Marsh was dealing with Senator Helms on this Solzhenitsyn question before. Is he still discussing a possible meeting with Senator Helms?

MR. NESSEN: I think Jack Marsh's role was as Congressional liaison man since the original request had come from two Members of the Senate. That was his role.

Q Was that request by Helms solicited by the White House, by any chance?

MR. NESSEN: The original request, no.

Q Did the President decide on Saturday that he had made a mistake in not setting a date to see Solzhenitsyn on that day or within a few days after that? Is that what his decision was?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it was in that context because, as I told Marty, there was no specific decision made one way or the other to see him or not to see him. But he did think he ought to make clear that he was willing or happy or pleased to see him.

Q Has there been any White House contact with Solzhenitsyn?

MR. NESSEN: Not directly with Solzhenitsyn.

Q Indirectly?

Q When did he acquire the necessary substance?

MR. NESSEN: Mary, Helen's question was, has there been indirect contact with Solzhenitsyn?

I think Helms and Thurmond have been working on the matter.

Q Has there been any response?

MR. NESSEN: There has been nothing proposed yet.

Q Ron, could it be that you have not extended a specific formal invitation to Mr. Solzhenitsyn now because there is a fear in the White House that because of this initial flap maybe Solzhenitsyn would say, "The hell with it, I don't want to see the President"?

MR. NESSEN: Solzhenitsyn was asked by Larry Spivak on Sunday whether he would want to see the President, and he didn't answer, really.

Q Ron, have these letters that have come in had any effect on the President taking an initiative now apparently to have this meeting with Solzhenitsyn? Have the letters that have come in had any effect?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, the President did not know the letter count and I didn't know it until I went and dug around in response to a query at the briefing.

Q Ron, I would like to ask one more question on Turkey. Does the White House have reason to believe that Turkey is willing to delay the renegotiation on the bases?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard for me to tell from here, Forrest, because, as I said, Ambassador Macomber is meeting with Foreign Ministry officials there today and I just don't know what the content or whatever decisions might be made at those meetings.

Q Have we expressed a desire for a delay?

MR. NESSEN: If the Turks would like to begin the negotiations we will, of course, begin them.

Q The Agriculture Department has issued figures today that have favorable news for you, on the economy. As Steve drew out, industrial production has just about ended, and inflation -- I believe there are also some good signs there.

What does this do to the possibility of the President asking for an extension of the 1975 tax cut?

MR. NESSEN: First of all, let me say that the figure yesterday on the turn-up in industrial output is a very important statistic, as you know from following the economy, and today's figure, I guess, on the GNP and other factors -- both of those are just about in line with what the expectations have been, and I think show that the President's view, and both Government and private economists seem to agree that the recession is at the bottom and is beginning to go up.

The tax cut extension is a question that will not be addressed until late this year -- November or so -- and the reason for that is that there is no use making a decision six months ahead of the time you have to make it. You need to wait and see what the state of the economy is in the late part of the year before deciding what additional stimulus, if any, it needs in 1976.

Q What is the status of the GSA appointment?

MR. NESSEN: There is no status that I can report to you.

Q Ron, the President announced 3.2 million tons of sales of wheat to the Soviet Union yesterday, and there are some rumors of more. Do you have a clue as to what that might do to consumer prices? And also, do you have any indications as to whether more announcements are forthcoming on wheat or corn?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President said at his news conference in Chicago that, number one, he and the Agriculture Department and the Economic Policy Board are all watching the state of those sales carefully and, of course, the procedure that the Agriculture Department has for notification is being followed.

The President said that the sales of the size that he has heard about would have a minimal or zero effect on prices within the United States.

Q What sizes?

MR. NESSEN: Well, just to give you a little background, the wheat crop this year is expected to be 60 million metric tons. It is an enormously large wheat crop -- 20 percent above last year's wheat crop.

The Agriculture Department, I believe, has announced a firm sale of two million tons and a probable sale of another 1.2 million tons.

Well, the United States only needs for its own use about a third or 40 percent of the wheat crop, so that leaves something like 35 million tons for export. So if you are talking about a sale of 3.2 million tons, it is a real drop in the bucket -- or a drop in the bushel.

The other factor is that a few years ago when there was a bit of a public flap about large Russian wheat purchases, other countries in the world were having problems with their own wheat crops and so there were other foreign sales in addition to the Russians, but this year the difference is that not only does the United States have an enormous crop but Canada and Australia are also having an extremely successful wheat crop, so there is the anticipation that there would not be the competition for American wheat this year.

A third factor is that the wheat crop is about 85 or 90 percent harvested so there is no question now of some of it being ruined by drought or floods or anything else. We know what the size is going to be, and it is going to be very large.

Well, to sum up, it is anticipated that the Russian wheat sales will have no or a very small effect on American consumer prices, but the President is watching closely.

Q Ron, any expectations of any other announcements soon in terms of either wheat or corn?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, myself. As I say, the notification procedure is followed and the Agriculture Department will announce whatever future sales.

Q Ron, may I ask you something? Mr. Bob Melvin, the President of the National Association of Farmer Electric Cooperatives, brought out this week that the farmers are just victims here of the manipulation up and down. He says there needs definitely to be some Government help here, long-range planning or something, to prevent this.

Farmers' prices go up and down, were some of the rumors. Up to yesterday they could not find out really what was going on and it is all just in the private sector.

Doesn't the President think that he can urge the Soviets to buy more or sell more some way or do a selling job, or does he not believe there is some help that can be given here? Our farmers are going to go broke.

MR. NESSEN: Quite the opposite, Sarah. The President's view -- and he stated it in farm areas, and I think it has been well received -- is that he wants to free American agriculture from too many Government controls, and he has. One result of this, at least, is this bumper wheat crop.

One thing to keep in mind about these sales is, number one, they are good for the farmer and make the economy of farm areas proper.

Q Not if he is getting a low price.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know what --

Q If he does not sell more wheat to the Soviets or somebody, we are not going to get anything but a low price.

MR. NESSEN: Well, one advantage of the Russian wheat sale is that on the one hand it does not affect the American prices and it does help the farmer, and it helps the whole national economy. The largest single element of American sales overseas is agricultural products.

Q I don't think you understand me.

MR. NESSEN: It is a good source of foreign exchange and it helps our economy.

Q Well, nobody is arguing that; we just want more of it.

I don't think you get my point. Can't the President do something to do a better selling job for us to sell more wheat or to alleviate these conditions whereby they plant so much? Can't he initiate some leadership and long-range planning here?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President, of course, is in favor of agricultural exports because it is necessary for the farmers' economic health and the economic health of the country, and at the same time he is watching it carefully so it does not get to a level where American consumers are forced to pay high prices.

Dick?

Q In light of this bumper wheat crop, Ron, can we expect an increased contribution of the PL-480 program, or to the World Food Council?

MR. NESSEN: Well, with 60 million tons of wheat and American demands being about a third of that, and overseas sales taking up some, it is clear that there will be a good deal of at least wheat available for the Food For Peace program. I cannot give you the exact numbers.

Q Have any of our deep thinkers ever thought of bartering wheat for Russian oil?

MR. NESSEN: I have got to find one of the deep thinkers and ask him that.

Q Have you ever thought of that? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It just came to me.

Q In view of this bumper crop, Ron, does the President expect that there will be a substantial reduction in domestic food prices for consumers at the consumer level?

MR. NESSEN: Well, wheat is certainly one element of food prices. I think I saw somewhere where the actual wheat content of, say, bread is a very tiny portion of the cost.

Q Feed prices.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I will check.

Q Ron, you have mentioned the Agriculture Department's notification on the total expectation that the Russians have for the purchase. Why are the sales just coming out in bits and pieces? Surely the Economic Policy Board has been told how much they really are in the market for, so why can't you give us that figure?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that figure.

Secretary Butz has talked to the President as recently as yesterday and the Economic Policy Board has reviewed the matter as recently as today, so they are keeping a close watch on it. I don't have the figures.

Q What did Butz tell Ford yesterday when they talked?

MR. NESSEN: He told the President just what I have told you -- two million-ton purchase, and then a 1.2 million-ton purchase -- the overall size of the crop, the other demands, and so forth.

Q And he said this is still being left to private traders who go to Russia and well wheat?

MR. NESSEN: That is the way the American system works.

Q Ron, you talked about the notification system. The companies have some kind of either legal or regulatory commitment to report to the Department of Agriculture.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q My question is really the same as his. Really it is two questions.

Is the President satisfied with the Agriculture Department's so-called notification system which was subject to a great deal of criticism in 1972 for being slow?

MR. NESSEN: It was modified since 1972.

Q We didn't have it in 1972.

Q Is he satisfied now that the Agriculture Department is going to know in a timely fashion, through this notification system, the total size of the Russian purchases?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q And if so, why can't you tell us now?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would, but I don't have the information, Jim, as I said.

Q Can you get it?

MR. NESSEN: It is done through the private enterprise system, Jim.

Q It is reported to the Agriculture Department.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Has that report come in? Does the Agriculture Department know how much the Russians actually mean to buy this season? And if they do, if the reporting system has been improved, can you give us a total or can you get it for us?

MR. NESSEN: It is not done on a projection basis; it is done on a per contract basis -- notification given in a timely way. As each notification is given, the Agriculture Department has been announcing it.

Q Let me put it this way: Are the two sales that have been reported to the President so far the only sales that the Agriculture Department knows about, to date?

MR. NESSEN: You have to ask the Agriculture Department. As far as I know, they are.

Q Before somebody says thank you, could I get to oil?

MR. NESSEN: There is no chance of anybody saying thank you.

We have missed the space linking-up.

Q Did you say that the bumper crop would cause a reduction in consumer prices?

MR. NESSEN: I will need to check that figure. I am not that much up on it. I have a vast wealth of farm knowledge but not that.

Q Ron, I am not an expert on this but you mentioned a while ago that you kind of blame the government controls, he wanted them off rather than on. Weren't they off this year and yet we still had this big wheat crop?

MR. NESSEN: We had the big wheat crop because they were off this year.

Q Because they were off. Ford's policy was to take them off?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q So is it his fault we have the bumper wheat crop?

MR. NESSEN: Is it bad to have a bumper wheat crop?

Q Yes, it is; it is too big a crop.

Q Ron, could I ask you --

MR. NESSEN: Do we have any more wheat questions?

Q I am getting nervous because I see Fran --

MR. NESSEN: Don't get nervous. You know I never leave.

Q Frank is getting edgy now.

MR. NESSEN: Don't get edgy, Frank.

Q The hell with continuity.

MR. NESSEN: That's what I say.

Q Do you have anything to say about the Senate action, the Senate vote to roll back oil prices and continue on one category of oil and continue controls on another?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is just absolutely the wrong course. If this country is going to free itself of dependence on foreign countries to control the price and supply of our oil and there is nothing in that that is going to contribute to Americans producing oil for themselves so that they will have enough and that they will control their own supply in price instead. One hundred eighty degrees in the wrong direction.

Q Could I follow that up. The person buying gasoline at the pump, isn't this the absolutely right course for him to hold down gasoline prices while the President is advocating higher prices?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I have said over and over again, this is a matter that needs to be looked at in the long term and the thing to keep in mind is two things.

What, Jim?

Q I was reminded of Lord Keynes' comment that in the long term we are all dead.

MR. NESSEN: That's true.

The long term is that 10 years from now do you want to be importing 13 million barrels a day from foreign countries, 65 percent of it from Arab countries who can cut it off, raise the price, do whatever they want with it or 10 years from now do you want to have Americans produce their own oil and have other supplies of other kinds of energy to run your economy? That is one question.

The second question is, if Congress wants to lower people's prices, why don't they pass the tax refund and tax revision proposal instead of ignoring it so that people who are paying higher prices will get that money back?

Thirdly, when you artificially set the price of oil low, not only do you provide no incentive for people to drill for new wells but you also provide no incentive for people to switch to other forms of fuel. When you can get cheap oil, you burn oil and when the price of oil goes up you switch over to coal or you get research projects going and production processes going to find alternate forms of oil. It is wrong, it is not going to get to where this country needs to be 10 years from now.

Q Did you get all that, Ted?

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:20 EDT)