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NEWS CONFERENCE

#388

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH JACK HUSHEN

AT 11:38 A.M. EST

DECEMBER 10, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. HUSHEN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Bill Greener is under the weather --

Q How did you arrange that?

MR. HUSHEN: -- suffering from the virus he picked up somewhere.

Q Are you auditioning for something?

MR. HUSHEN: I am told he is not alone. Walter Cronkite is suffering from the same malaise. (Laughter)

Q What does that mean?

Q Is this what they mean by the long march?

MR. HUSHEN: Larry Speakes is in the Cabinet meeting, and if there is something to post as a result of that meeting, we will do so at three o'clock.

Q Why three o'clock?

MR. HUSHEN: Because the meeting will probably go beyond the end of the briefing.

Q Can't we get a posting before three o'clock?

MR. HUSHEN: We can try to do it right afterwards. We can try to do it right afterwards.

I don't have any other announcements to make.

Q Jack, for three days the White House Press Office has had Senator Proxmire's statement charging the use of limousines to take administrative officials, including Mr. Nessen, between domicile and place of employment as a violation of Title 31 of the U.S. Code.

MORE

#388

I have a two-part question. The first is, since the cost of the chauffeurs is \$15,000 to \$17,000 a year, \$2,000 for gas and maintenance, and since the Proxmire report says 800 of these, how does this square with the President's devotion to economy in Government when these aren't even carpooled?

Q Yes or no? (Laughter)

Q Is that the first part or the second part?

Q That is the first part.

MR. HUSHEN: Do you want to give me your second question, Les?

Q Sure. What is the White House explanation for Senator Proxmire's charge of lawbreaking, or is the White House going to answer like Russell Train, who said, "I don't apologize even if it is against the law"? (Laughter)

MR. HUSHEN: Do you have a third question?

Q No.

MR. HUSHEN: I think I will have to pass on the first two.

Q They asked for a copy of this two days ago, Jack. Was that just a joke or what? I mean, does the White House think this is funny?

MR. HUSHEN: It will be responded to.

Q Will it? When, do you think?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't know.

Q Who is handling that, the Counsel's Office?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't know. It would go through the Congressional Liaison Office first.

Q Jack, a question about this compromise on the Kissinger contempt matter. Are those NSC records at any time -- the records themselves or copies -- going to leave the White House, or will all the work of looking at them and examining them be done here at the White House?

MR. HUSHEN: The material is being kept here. The summaries of the decisions which were made available, the committee can make notes on, but the material will stay here.

Q I assume they could take their own notes away. I just wondered if they could take actual copies.

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Do you have any comment on the Pike committee's announcement that the contempt matter is being dropped? Does the President have any comment on that, or you?

Q I can't hear the question.

MR. HUSHEN: The question was whether we have any comment on what Congressman Pike was quoted as saying, that he plans not to press the contempt charge.

We have sought all along to meet the committee's requests, and we felt, after the meeting last night, that we had.

Q Does the White House feel that things like this are legitimate or not; that is, threatening to cite the Secretary of State for contempt?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not going to comment on the wisdom of Congress.

Q Jack, has the President decided whether to sign the energy bill?

MR. HUSHEN: No, he has not.

Q How about the common situs bill?

MR. HUSHEN: No, he has not.

Q Did he discuss either of them with the Congressional visitors today?

MR. HUSHEN: Yes, both matters were brought up by the GOP leaders, and as either Senator Scott or Congressman Rhodes said, there was quite a wide-ranging discussion this morning and recommendations as to what the President should or should not do were voiced by several members of the leadership, but he gave them no indication as to what he would do on either bill.

Q Did he have any timetable?

MR. HUSHEN: Not really.

Q How about the tax cut question? Was that discussed, and if so, what points were raised?

MR. HUSHEN: Discussed in the context of the President being very firm in his position that he will veto any tax cut bill that does not have a spending ceiling attached to it.

Q That includes the six-month extension?

MR. HUSHEN: That includes any extension.

Q Does the President have any views on the propriety of the Senate Intelligence Committee giving polygraph tests to its staff members in an attempt to find a source of leaks?

MR. HUSHEN: Does the President have any view on what the Senate committee is doing?

Q Yes.

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Would the President conceive of giving polygraphs to White House staff in an attempt to find sources of leaks?

MR. HUSHEN: I am not going to answer a hypothetical question like that.

Q Jack, what was the President's reaction to the criticism of women's groups of his nominee, Judge Stevens, and the Judge's attitude toward equal rights for women?

MR. HUSHEN: I have not talked to him about it, and I have not heard him say anything about it.

Q Would you ask him, and also how he reacted to their request that he withdraw the nomination on this ground?

MR. HUSHEN: The President, as I am sure you know, is firmly committed to his nominee and believes that he has the best nominee for the job, has picked the best nominee for the job.

Q There is an interview in a French newspaper today in which President Sadat of Egypt says that Ford is to visit that country next year. Is there any word on that from this end?

MR. HUSHEN: I have nothing to give you on that at all.

Q No indication of whether this is being indicated to Sadat from the White House?

MR. HUSHEN: I have nothing to give you.

Q Is the President thinking about going to Houston for the Southern Republican meeting this weekend or is that firmly and finally ruled out?

MR. HUSHEN: No travel plans that I am aware of.

Q Anything further on the Vail trip, any further guidance for us?

MR. HUSHEN: Nothing beyond what Ron had given you before he left.

Q Why is it so hard to get some details on that?

MR. HUSHEN: On what?

Q On the Vail trip.

MR. HUSHEN: I think that the situation in the days ahead regarding legislation is somewhat fluid and I think the President will determine how much time he can take by the legislative program.

Q Jack, could you explain that? What situation is fluid?

MR. HUSHEN: The tax cut-spending limit legislation, for instance.

Q You mean the President is thinking of holding Congress in and might not be ready to go to Vail?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't want to speculate along that line.

Q Why not? The Republican leaders said as much this morning. You can tell us the same thing, can't you?

MR. HUSHEN: We don't rule it out.

Q Can you confirm that the President has definitely decided not to stay nearly as long as he had originally planned, and that at this point he is considering a stay of only about five days, starting about the 23rd and running through the 28th?

MR. HUSHEN: Originally planned by whom? Are you basing it on last year?

Q No, assuming that --

MR. HUSHEN: We had not announced any dates.

Q The Transportation Office had arranged accommodations for reporters starting from the 20th of December through the 3rd, I think, of January.

MR. HUSHEN: I think the Transportation Office was just trying to be ready to meet any contingencies that might arise, and I don't think that what the Transportation Office does is going to be the controlling factor in what the President does.

Q At this point, regardless of the steps taken by the Transportation Office, is the President currently thinking in terms of only about five days there, assuming that he has no problems with Congress?

MR. HUSHEN: I can't add anything to what Ron said regarding the length of time the President plans to spend at Vail. As far as I know, there are no firm decisions.

Q Jack, as I remember last year, Vail was put off on a day-to-day basis until he finally cleared up work here, and he left suddenly on the 22nd. Is there a chance that we won't get a firm departure date for Vail until the last minute this year?

MR. HUSHEN: I think, knowing of the considerations that affect all of you regarding families and travel plans, et cetera, because it is over the holiday season, that we will try to do the best we can to give you the kind of guidance that is necessary.

Q It could be the kind of situation last year where it was put off on a day-to-day basis?

MR. HUSHEN: I think you can look down the road and see the decisions that are going to have to be made before he could leave.

Q I don't like to take up briefing time with something like this, but just as a practical matter, can you at this point say that the President definitely will not stay beyond a week, for instance? That is the time-frame that Ron was talking about.

MORE

#388

MR. HUSHEN: As I said, I have nothing to add or subtract to what Ron said about that, and I don't think there is anything to be -- even if I were to leave this podium right now and go check, I would come back with the same answer. There is no firm decision.

Q Jack, has the White House ruled out political travel between now and the Vail trip?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't think there is any travel.

Q That would be yes, then. Is that what you are saying?

MR. HUSHEN: As far as I know.

Are you talking about this Southern Republicans meeting?

Q Or any other.

MR. HUSHEN: As far as I know, there is no travel.

Q Can you give us any more of a readout on the Dobrynin thing here than what you did last night?

MR. HUSHEN: Not really. The firm time for the meeting was not picked until late in the day, and that was one of the reasons we were unable to give you the guidance ahead of time.

Q Can you tell us whether the President gave them a new negotiating position or a new position on SALT?

MR. HUSHEN: All I can say in response to that is that the President asked the Ambassador to come in.

Q Jack, just as a matter of interest, were there plans to announce it if his car had not been spotted, or do you know that? Can you tell us if that had been hoped to be a private meeting?

MR. HUSHEN: No, it did not. I think if we would have wanted to have a private meeting, I think we probably could have. I mean, there was no attempt made to bring the Ambassador in by anything other than the front door.

Q What was the meeting about?

MR. HUSHEN: To discuss matters of current interest, including SALT, the Secretary of State's possible trip to the Soviet Union and other matters.

Q Did those other matters include a possible meeting with Chairman Brezhnev while he is in Cuba?

Q Pregnant.

Q Pregnant pause.

MR. HUSHEN: Don't read anything into the pause. I was just debating whether to say I just cannot give you anything on that --

Q I think you blushed, too.

MR. HUSHEN: -- or to say that I have no information to that effect-- (Laughter)

Q Let us take our pick.

MR. HUSHEN:--which is a little different.

As far as I know, no.

Q So we can't quote you as saying nothing should be read into the pause? (Laughter)

Q Have you asked that question or is it just that you have just not been told about that?

Q Question.

MR. HUSHEN: Fran wanted to know if I asked that specific question.

I did not ask that specific question but I did talk at length with people who were in the meeting so I feel somewhat comfortable in knowing what transpired.

Q Did they pause before answering to you?

MR. HUSHEN: A couple of times.

Q Speaking of that, did the Ambassador amplify or further explain the rather sharp attack made by Mr. Brezhnev in Poland a day or so ago?

MR. HUSHEN: I don't know.

Q As far as you know, that is not the statement.

MR. HUSHEN: I have no information to give you on that. I just don't know the answer to that.

Q We have not asked you whether the Ambassador brought anything new from the Soviet Union on SALT in the way of a proposal or a reply to that rather old U. S. proposal now. Did he bring anything new?

Q What is the question?

MR. HUSHEN: The question was did Ambassador Dobrynin bring anything to the White House in the form of a proposal, I presume, or response or something.

The only answer I can give you to that is that he came to the White House at the request of the President.

Q Did the President tell the Ambassador about his meetings with the leaders of the People's Republic of China?

MR. HUSHEN: That would have to go into the category of other matters. I will check and see if I can get a specific answer.

Q Did they discuss hegemony? (Laughter)

Q Or judgemony, either one?

Q About the Cabinet meeting that is now going on, do you have the agenda on that you could give us so we could have some idea of what is up for discussion?

MR. HUSHEN: He will talk to them about his trip and the budget.

Q Does the President have any personal feelings about Jeffery St. John's nationally televised decision that there is a prima facie case for Mr. Ford having a drinking problem?

MR. HUSHEN: Who is Jeffery St. John?

Q He is a Conservative columnist.

Q If it is any help to you, Bill said yesterday he would not dignify the question by answering it. (Laughter)

MR. HUSHEN: And I wouldn't, either.

The trip and the budget are the primary things for the Cabinet meeting.

Q Can you tell us what he is meeting with Rockefeller about?

MR. HUSHEN: Just a routine meeting.

Q A routine meeting is usually late in the afternoon on a Thursday.

MR. HUSHEN: No, it occurs whenever -- it is a flexible time period.

Q Jack, did the President have any reaction to the Republican National Committee's decision on fund raising in light of the reports that PFC is running low on funds?

MR. HUSHEN: Not so far as I know.

Q He had no reaction at all?

MR. HUSHEN: No.

Q Do you know whether this is unprecedented? I mean has ever an incumbent President been not given the use of the list or has this applied to all incumbent Republican Presidents, or do you know? Could you give us some readout on that?

MR. HUSHEN: No. I think you could probably get a better answer to that at the Republican National Committee. I am not that familiar with it.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 11:55 A.M. EST)