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NEWS CONFERENCE #395

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH BILL GREENER

AT 12:02 P.M. EST

DECEMBER 18, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. GREENER: One announcement: The President will attend the swearing-in ceremonies of Judge Stevens as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court tomorrow, December 19, 1975, at 10:00 a.m. The oath will be administered in the courtroom.

Those wishing to cover the ceremonies should apply for special passes to the Court Information Officer, room 30, on the ground floor of the Court. The passes may be picked up at room 30 between 8:00 a.m. and 9:45 a.m. on Friday.

The President is expected to depart the White House at around 9:45, and return at 10:55.

Any other additional information concerning coverage should be directed to Mr. Frank M. Hepler, Marshal of the Court, at 393-1640.

Q I assume there will be a travel pool?

MR. GREENER: Yes.

Q Will the President have remarks there?

MR. GREENER: No, I don't believe so.

Q That does not apply to the travel pool or anything, does it?

MR. GREENER: Well, he may have remarks. I will have to check on that, Aldo.

The question is, what about the travel pool. Do we get their passes?

MR. SPEAKES: We will take care of that.

MR. GREENER: That does not apply to the travel pool.

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Q Bill, in light of the President's statement that truth is the glue that holds Government together --

Q Excuse me. Before you get into that, could I ask a question?

Is that going to be in the Supreme Court Chamber?

MR. GREENER: Yes, in the courtroom.

Q So that means there is no coverage of that, television or radio; is that correct?

MR. GREENER: I don't know. Those wishing to cover the ceremonies -- the information should come from Mr. Hepler.

Q The procedure is you never get anything.

Q Bill, in the light of that statement about truth, I am just wondering how do you explain the President's telling the Judiciary Committee "At no time after I became President was the subject of a pardon for Richard Nixon raised" in light of the Garment memo and the reported conversation with General Haig?

MR. GREENER: Well, let's get that in some context. One, in his testimony before the Judiciary Committee, or the Hungate subcommittee, to be exact, and I am sure you have gone over it very thoroughly --

Q It was not under oath I discovered.

MR. GREENER: Well, at any rate, whether under oath or not --

Q Are you sure of that?

Q Yes, I checked.

MR. GREENER: He stated in that that "At no time after I became President on August 9, 1974, was the subject of a pardon for Richard M. Nixon raised by the former President or by anyone representing him. Also, no one on my staff brought up the subject until the day before my press conference on August 28, 1974."

Secondly, as for any assurances, as the story reports, that were given to General Haig by the President on the pardoning, the President gave no assurances to General Haig on the pardoning of President Nixon on August 28 or any date prior to that.

Q Bill, if my memory of the transcript serves me correctly, where he says "until the day before August 28" he said then the subject was only raised in reference to the possibility of a pardon being discussed at the press conference.

MR. GREENER: That is correct.

Q Well, Mr. Buchen is quoted as saying, "The President now recalls" --

MR. GREENER: Mr. Buchen is not being reported as saying "now."

Q It was quoted on the front page of the paper this morning, Bill, was it not?

MR. GREENER: Read it, Les. It does not say that.

Q "Now recalls he talked with Haig." Isn't that the quote?

MR. GREENER: The President did talk with Haig as noted here in reference to the press conference.

Q I see.

Q Is that the only way in which the President before August 28 ever discussed the matter with Haig or anyone else?

MR. GREENER: Except as outlined in the testimony on August 1, which is also in the testimony.

Q What did he do on August 1, Bill?

MR. GREENER: I will have to find it for you.

In his testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on October 17, the President testified that the first talk about a pardon with General Haig came in a meeting with General Haig at 3:30 p.m. on August 1.

Q Bill, the implication of the Washington Post story is that the President was somewhat less than truthful in his prior comments on the matter. The pardon otherwise -- if we are picking nits, you don't run it eight columns across the top of the page.

Are you prepared to say here that the President's position is absolutely without any change or evasion at any time?

MR. GREENER: Yes.

Q Would you ask the Washington Post for a retraction, Bill?

MR. GREENER: Pardon me?

Q Would you be willing to ask the Post for a retraction if they put this on the top of the page?

MR. GREENER: I don't know what I should ask them to retract, the report sources and things, and that is the way they plan to report it.

Q Bill, let me put it another way: Are you saying that the President has always dealt with the public on the matter of the pardon with complete candor?

MR. GREENER: Yes, I am.

Q Now Bill, let me see if I can understand this. On October 17 he says, "At no time after I became President on August 9 was the subject of a pardon for Richard M. Nixon raised," right?

MR. GREENER: Until --

Q Now, you are saying that --

MR. GREENER: Let me finish reading the sentence. Don't stop in the middle of the sentence.

Q I am sorry.

"At no time after I became President on August 9, 1974, was the subject of a pardon for Richard M. Nixon raised by the former President or by anyone representing him."

MR. GREENER: That is correct.

Q Okay.

MR. GREENER: "Also, no one on my staff brought up the subject until the day before my first press conference on August 28, 1974."

Q Can you keep reading beyond that a little?

MR. GREENER: "At that time I was advised that questions on the subject might be raised by media reporters at the press conference."

Q Did President Ford consider --

MR. GREENER: Tom, let Mort finish his question.

Q I am sorry.

MR. GREENER: I am not interpreting it; I am reading it from the testimony.

Q Yes, but you just said that he never raised it as a suggestion and the testimony says he raised it as an option. It does not seem to me there is a big difference, Bill.

MR. GREENER: Bob, I don't know how it can be a difference. I am going to have to reread the whole testimony for you.

Q No, you don't have to reread it.

You just made a judgment call on what Haig calls an option.

MR. GREENER: No, I didn't. Let me finish reading.

"Shortly after noon, General Haig requested another appointment as promptly as possible. He came to my office about 3:30 p.m. for a meeting that was to last for approximately three-quarters of an hour. Only then did I learn of the damaging nature of a conversation on June 23, 1972, and one of the tapes was due to go to Judge Sirica the following Monday. I described the meeting at one point. It did include references to a possible pardon for Mr. Nixon to which the third and fourth questions in House Resolution 1367 are directed. However, nearly the entire meeting covered other subjects, all dealing with the totally new situation resulting from the critical evidence on the tape." Then -- I am jumping now.

"On the resignation issue, there were put forth a number of options which General Haig reviewed with me. As I recall his conversation, various possible options were being considered, including:

"One: The President temporarily step aside under the 25th Amendment;

"Two: Delaying resignation until further along in the impeachment process;

"Three: Trying to first settle for a censure vote as a means of avoiding either impeachment or need to resign;

"Four: The question of whether the President could pardon himself;

"Five: Pardoning first the Watergate defendants, then himself, followed by resignation;

"Six: A pardon to the President should he resign.

"The rush of events placed an urgency on what was to be done. It became even more critical in view of a prolonged impeachment trial which was expected to last possibly four months longer."

Then he goes on and he just outlined the various options, Bob, and that is all.

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Q You do not agree that the word "recommendation" is similar to the word "option?"

MR. GREENER: No, I don't. If I tell you, Bob, we have four or five things we can do today -- we can either go here, we can go there, we can go here, we can go there, we can go there -- and don't tell you which one I recommend you do, then I don't consider myself recommending anything.

Q But does it not depend a little on how it is presented, and that we don't know? All we have is that it was presented as an option. We don't know the words that were used.

MR. GREENER: Well, there is nothing new in the conversation we are having today, Bob, beyond what was held on the Hill at the time of the testimony. I am saying those facts are still there in answering your original question that the President has dealt with candor and truthfulness at all times on this matter.

Q Was this August 1 that you are reading from?

MR. GREENER: Yes. Why don't I just have this up here, Ted.

Q That meeting was the August 1 meeting?

MR. GREENER: Yes, it was.

Q Before he was President?

MR. GREENER: Yes.

Q Bill, after General Haig became President Ford's Chief of Staff, President Ford made the decision to pardon former President Nixon. Can you tell us when General Haig was advised of that decision?

MR. GREENER: I cannot, Bob, at this time. It was not on August 28 or before and I would have to find the exact date from somebody. I don't know.

Q Bill, could you tell me, when General Haig briefed the President for the press conference on the pardon issue, did he use the words or refer to "the alarming state of President Nixon's health?"

MR. GREENER: Phil, I don't know the exact words nor was anyone else taking a transcript of the discussion during a press conference preparation meeting. I am simply stating that there was no impassioned plea by General Haig or any other member of the staff to the President to pardon President Nixon; two, that the President, as reported in the story, did not assure Haig on August 28.

Q Except that it is possible that in the context of at least -- refute me if I am wrong, but isn't it possible that in the context of the discussion of the pardon in preparation for the news conference the following day that General Haig could have recommended a pardon at that time, in the context --

MR. GREENER: Very doubtful, since Phil Buchen prepared the question and answer that they went over.

Q Bill, could I just make sure that at least I understand. When you say there was no impassioned plea by General Haig or anybody else --

MR. GREENER: I am refuting the quote in the front -- the lead of that story only.

Q You are referring --

MR. GREENER: I am not trying to use any technical terms that the plea was made but not impassioned. Is that what you mean?

Q No. What I mean is that you are referring to August 28 or prior to that, is that correct?

MR. GREENER: No. On the plea, there was none made by any member of the staff, to the President, prior to his decision as he stated in his testimony.

Q Prior to his decision?

MR. GREENER: As is stated in his testimony.

Q Did he ever see that Garment letter or the memo or whatever it is?

MR. GREENER: Not to his knowledge, nothing -- nor to General Haig's knowledge.

Q Representative Elizabeth Holtzman questioned the President at that subcommittee meeting about a deal and he interrupted her and he said, "Miss Holtzman, there was no deal." Does he still stand on that? Can you speak for him for that point?

MR. GREENER: I can speak for anything in this testimony. The President stands on that testimony.

Q Yes, but he had already, on August 1, had a meeting on the subject of the pardon.

MR. GREENER: He did not have a meeting on the subject of a pardon. He had a short meeting that covered a number of subjects and one of the things that was brought up was an option of it and there was no meeting on it and he explains that, evidently, to the satisfaction of Miss Holtzman also.

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Q Bill, did you talk with the President this morning about this matter?

MR. GREENER: Yes, I did.

Q Did the matter come up in your conversation with the President whether Al Haig recommended or advocated, whichever word you want to use, a pardon for former President Nixon?

MR. GREENER: Yes, it did.

Q And the answer was?

MR. GREENER: No.

Q Thank you.

MR. GREENER: Don't you want to ask me if I talked to Al Haig?

Q Yes. Did you?

MR. GREENER: Yes, I did.

Q And?

MR. GREENER: The same answer.

Q All right.

Q Which is what, please? That Haig told you --

MR. GREENER: Exactly what I have been saying, that I talked to both Haig and the President. Well, I did not talk to Haig. I sat beside Dick Cheney while he talked to Haig and listened to the questions and answers.

Q Bill, Leonard Garment says that he gave a copy of his --

Q Finish the sentence, please.

MR. GREENER: What sentence?

Q Tell us what Cheney asked and what Haig said on this subject, if you can approximate his words.

MR. GREENER: I don't plan to approximate it, I just plan to state that the President's testimony remains valid, true and truthful.

Q So Haig never made any recommendation for a pardon at any time?

Q According to Haig?

MR. GREENER: According to Haig.

Q And according to the President?

MR. GREENER: And according to the President.

Q Bill, you said you refuted the lead in this story. What part of the story will you accept? (Laughter)

MR. GREENER: It is not my job to accept.

Q No, I just want to know. This is a very serious charge, Bill -- a very serious charge -- raised on the top of the Post.

MR. GREENER: What is the charge?

Q Well --

MR. GREENER: If you can outline the charge to me --

Q This is what other people have been asking about this, Bill, and I never got a good answer.

MR. GREENER: Well, I have answered everybody else. If you can give me a new charge, I will answer it.

Q All right. You refute the lead in the story, that's it? Is there anything else in the story that you refute?

MR. GREENER: Yes, the second paragraph.

Q And the second. Anything else?

MR. GREENER: I don't know.

Q Does the President have any reaction to the House sustaining his veto on the tax bill?

MR. GREENER: He is, obviously, quite pleased with it.

Q We could not hear you.

MR. GREENER: It was something about the tax bill.

He asked me if the President was pleased about the House sustaining the veto and I said he was, obviously, quite pleased.

Q Bill, does the President expect any kind of action between now and the end of the year, a new tax bill or anything else?

MR. GREENER: Well, the President outlined that last night in his message that he read down here.

Q He only said if there is time.

MR. GREENER: Well, he certainly hopes that something will be done.

Q Bill, what steps is the President taking between now and Christmas to get something done? Is he going to send another bill up there?

MR. GREENER: I don't know exactly what they are working on up there but the President stated last night what he thought should be done.

Q Has the President indicated his intention to sign or veto the energy bill?

MR. GREENER: He has not.

Q When do you expect him to disclose his decision on that?

MR. GREENER: When he makes up his mind.

Q Bill, House Democratic leaders previously said that if the veto is upheld on this bill they will simply send the same bill back to him. Would it be his intention to veto the same bill again and would he hold Congress over in a special session until he gets a bill he can accept?

MR. GREENER: Those are decisions that have not been made at this point, Russ.

Q Bill, last night he indicated a commitment to holding down Federal spending accompanied with another bill like the one he vetoed would satisfy him. Is he tempering his previous demand for a specific figure on a spending ceiling?

MR. GREENER: I think I will just stand on his words.

Q Bill, is it the President's belief that the Congress will go home without passing an extension of the tax cut?

MR. GREENER: It certainly is not the President's hope that they will.

Q That was not my question. My question was does the President now think that Congress will just go home and let the taxes jump in January?

MR. GREENER: I have not heard him address that particular point. He certainly said last night that there was plenty of time and he hopes that they will take the necessary action.

Q Bill, can we pursue that question about the special session?

MR. GREENER: I don't have an answer on that for you beyond what he has already stated.

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Q Well, we were led to believe last week, I guess, that if the President were to call them back into special session he would not do so until after New Year's. Is the President still considering a special session now, and has he indicated that he would not ask them to come back until after the recess?

MR. GREENER: Dick, I just said to that specific question I do not have an answer yet.

Q You said those decisions which have not been made yet.

MR. GREENER: That is correct.

Q Then, in fact, they are still open; is that right?

MR. GREENER: Yes, they are still open.

Q Bill, can you say whether he is considering trying to get this done before Christmas as he stated yesterday, or would he be more inclined to try to get something worked out between Christmas and New Year's?

MR. GREENER: He is hopeful that it will be done before Christmas, as he stated last night. As to what he is doing on that, Ann, I will just have to get on it. It has only been a few moments since the vote was taken, as you know.

Q Bill, is the President considering any kind of Executive action that would make it unnecessary to increase withholding?

MR. GREENER: I don't know that.

Q Bill, is there concern in the White House that a tax increase in January would harm the economy?

MR. GREENER: I believe Secretary Simon already addressed that question and I will stand on his words on it.

Q Bill, a technical question: How does it work if the President wants to keep the Congress in session? Can he in fact do so? Does he have the power to do so?

MR. GREENER: It is my understanding that he does, Bob, but I would have to get the full parliamentary procedure.

It is in the Constitution that he can keep them in session.

Q He calls them back into special session. He can't keep them.

MR. GREENER: They recess and then he calls them back into special session; is that correct?

Q Bill, does the President have the authority to temporarily maintain account withholding rates by Executive Order?

MR. GREENER: That is the question he asked, and I don't know that.

Q He asked whether he is going to do it.

MR. GREENER: He does not have the authority. John checked on it this morning.

Q Bill, it has been repeatedly said from that platform that the President would accept a concurrent resolution or possibly a sense of Congress resolution. Now, if Congress sends the same bill back along with one of these resolutions, would that take care of it?

MR. GREENER: The President will look at it and I think he made a statement last night of what he wanted and I will just stand on his words, Howard.

Q Bill, do you have any new word for us on the Angola situation and the Administration's view on it now?

MR. GREENER: Nothing beyond what was said yesterday, Fran.

Q Yesterday a Congressional Black Caucus charged that there were 25 to 50 U.S. advisers in the Angolan area. Do you stand by your statement yesterday?

MR. GREENER: Certainly.

Q Are there any U.S. advisers in the Angolan area, neighboring Zaire?

MR. GREENER: I will have Margie get that double-checked again. I stated on it yesterday and whatever I stated yesterday is still true today. I checked on it just before I came out.

Q Bill, the letter to Senator Stennis, if I could -- why has the President changed his mind about Mr. Bush as a possible Vice Presidential running mate? He had said earlier he would not rule him out and now he says that he will not consider him for Vice President. Why the change?

MR. GREENER: Well, one, as stated in the letter, Ambassador Bush asked him to do that because of the importance of the job and, two, I believe he also outlines the second reason there and that is he did not think that the post should ever be entailed in a six-month job. That is in the letter, though, Ted.

Q Bill, on Angola again, yesterday I had a vague feeling we were not asking the right questions and I am going to try again.

MR. GREENER: I can't believe it.

Q You said in several different ways yesterday that there are no Government sponsored advisers in Angola. There is a report today that there are from five to eight CIA "reporters" or employees reporting on Angola and developments there. Is that true? They are there not advising.

MR. GREENER: I have nothing beyond what I said yesterday. I will run that down again, if you like.

Q Now wait a minute.

MR. GREENER: You want me to answer?

Q I am very aware of what you said yesterday.

MR. GREENER: And you want me to answer whether or not there are five to eight CIA employees in Angola?

Q Right.

MR. GREENER: I don't have the answer to that; I will try to get it, Bob.

Q Bill, a related question: What information does the Government have about technical representatives of American firms in Angola at this point?

MR. GREENER: Technical representatives of American firms in Angola?

Q Right.

MR. GREENER: That is another question I will have to run down.

Q Bill, on the Post story, did Dick Cheney ask Haig whether he had told other people in the White House that the President had assured him there would be a pardon? The Post story says that various people, including Buchanan and Garment and others, were informed by Haig that the President was favorable toward a pardon.

MR. GREENER: That is not quite what it says, is it? What does it say?

Q Well, it says here, for one example, "A day or two after his meeting with Mr. Ford, Haig told another Nixon speech writer, Buchanan, that the President had agreed to a pardon for Nixon. This was after the 28th meeting."

MR. GREENER: Keep reading.

Q "Buchanan confirmed yesterday that he, too, had urged Haig to bring up the matter of a pardon and that afterward Haig indicated that a pardon was assured. Haig implied strongly that it was his personal intervention with the President that had secured the pardon, Buchanan said yesterday."

Do you want me to continue reading?

MR. GREENER: No. What is your question?

Q The question is whether Cheney asked Haig whether he had been going around the White House saying that a pardon was assured and that he had had an agreement from the President that there would be a pardon?

MR. GREENER: No, that question didn't come up.

Q What happened to the Leonard Garment memorandum that went to Buchen and to Haig?

MR. GREENER: I have no idea what happened to it except Mr. Buchen gave it back to Leonard Garment.

Q Was the President aware that this existed? You said he didn't see it. Was he aware that it existed?

Q Did Buchen discuss it with him?

MR. GREENER: No, he did not.

Q Why not, Bill? That seems kind of strange.

MR. GREENER: Well, he said that he used it in preparation for the Q and A's that he put together on the press conference and that after the press conference he handed it back to Garment.

Q That Buchen used it --

MR. GREENER: Himself.

Q -- in preparation --

MR. GREENER: Just had it there.



Q Was he aware that the memo existed?

MR. GREENER: He does not recall it, no.

Q Not only did he not see it but he does not recall its existence?

MR. GREENER: No.

Q Although it was used as part of the basis for answering questions?

MR. GREENER: No, it was not used as part of the basis for answering questions. It was used as part of the basis of what Phil Buchen did in preparing Q's and A's.

Q Bill, the Vice President said yesterday that he will not campaign in Florida nor in New Hampshire because in his words Callaway says that he, the Vice President, is a liability. How does the President feel about, number one, that the Vice President will not campaign for him, and how does he feel about Rockefeller's description of being a liability?

MR. GREENER: It is not a question I discussed with him today, Cliff.

Q Can you raise it with him?

MR. GREENER: I certainly will.

Q When you said yesterday that if anything was going to be said about the Angola situation from here the President would say it, do you expect a Presidential statement on American involvement in Angola today or any time soon?

MR. GREENER: There are no plans at this time.

Q Bill, can you tell us of any further U.S.-Soviet communications on Angola?

MR. GREENER: No.

Q Bill, I believe on a question -- this has been brought up at the White House, and that is this report for the Secret Service, why does it take so long for them to report on how a guy managed to jump over the fence twice? I think you said -- I am not sure, but I think you said you would check on that, Bill. I am not sure.

MR. GREENER: Check on why it took so long?

Q Yes. What is the Secret Service report? I mean, how have they explained it and why are they taking so long to do it, and so forth? Could you give us some enlightenment on that?

MR. GREENER: Nothing beyond the fact that I am sure they are trying to be as careful and accurate as possible.

Q It takes three days for them to discover why a guy got over a fence?

MR. GREENER: I am not an expert on that subject. I am just saying that I am sure they are trying to be careful and accurate in their report, Les.

Q Reflective.

Q Bill, to go back to the tax cut thing, you were asked a little bit ago if the President would accept this same bill that he vetoed if it came to him accompanied with a resolution to cut spending by an equal amount and you said, "I just refer you to the President's statement." Well, looking at his statement, he said, "The Congress still has time before Christmas to send me back a tax cut extension for 1976 coupled with a clear commitment to cut the growth of Federal spending."

Can we take that to mean he will accept just an extension of this year's package rather than the \$28 billion one he proposed if it has the equal spending cut? That seems to be what the President is saying here but, is that right?

MR. GREENER: I don't think I want to interpret his words. It is right there; it is exactly what he said.

Q Bill, have you talked to Phil Buchen about this story?

MR. GREENER: Yes, I have.

Q The story says that Buchen indicated that the President probably discussed the pardon with Haig after Ford's August 28 press conference. According to Buchen, the discussion occurred because Haig could have been upset at the answers at the press conference.

Does Buchen, in fact, think that the President did discuss with Haig a pardon after the press conference?

MR. GREENER: There is no recollection of it on the part of the President or General Haig.

Q What about Buchen? Does Buchen still think that they probably had that discussion?

MR. GREENER: They may have had a discussion on the questions and answers as given at the press conference but not to the extent that this --

Q Did they in fact have a discussion about the answers and questions at the press conference?

MR. GREENER: Not to the President.

Oh, on the questions?

Q Yes.

MR. GREENER: What did you ask me? Excuse me.

Q Did Haig and the President talk after the press conference about the answers on the subject of the pardon that the President had given?

MR. GREENER: Yes.

Q And what did Haig say about the answers?

MR. GREENER: There were five questions and General Haig mentioned that he thought that answer 4 was a little bit confusing in the context of the other four that were asked, and the President said to General Haig that as he recalls, to me, that he said to General Haig that he felt that he could have answered that question a little bit better himself in light of the other four.

Q And you are saying that the substance of the question -- that is, whether Nixon would be pardoned or not -- did not come up in that August 28 discussion?

MR. GREENER: Mort, all I can try to say once and for all is that the President of the United States has testified on this completely; he did it with candor and with truthfulness, and he stands on that testimony. I checked on the two specific items which everyone seemed to be interested in and that is, one, the allegation that he assured him on August 28, and he did not do that -- both General Haig and the President say it. I just don't see what we can gain by me going through that story step-by-step-by step, line-by-line-by-line, except to say that the President's statement was truthful and candid and clear.

Q I understand. Did Haig on the 28th, after the press conference, urge the President to pardon Nixon?

MR. GREENER: Again, the President states and General Haig states that at no time--and, as a matter of fact, as long as you are quoting from it, General Haig says in the same story that he did not do it; that is in the last paragraph if you want to find it.

Q Does President Ford feel that the American aid to Angola has accomplished its purpose?

MR. GREENER: What American aid to Angola?  
(Laughter)

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EST)