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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:20 A.M. MST

DECEMBER 24, 1975

WEDNESDAY  
(Vail, Colorado)

MR. NESSEN: Let me go through a number of announcements first.

The President will -- or already has -- gone skiing today. His plan is to ski just once for about two or two and a half hours this morning.

The President and Mrs. Ford will have dinner this evening at the home of Ted Kindel, who by now I think everybody knows. Ted Kindel is one of the founders of Vail, a friend of the Ford family for a long time. His father was the President's scoutmaster. He is formerly from the Middle West and so forth.

Q Where do they live now? They don't live in Dallas or somewhere?

MR. NESSEN: No, they live here and may have a home somewhere in the Midwest.

The President will go to church services this evening at 10:30. I think there is only one church in Vail. If not, I will get the church he is going to.

There will be a travel pool for the dinner and the same travel pool for the church.

The Fords plan to open their presents tomorrow morning this year. We will have a David Kennerly photo or photos to distribute after that. If you recall, last year Sheila Weidenfeld did a marvelous job of getting information about who gave what to whom and she will work on that and give that to you tomorrow.

Q Will you tell us when so we can show up for that information tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Let me talk to Sheila.

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Right after this briefing we are going to put out a statement. As you know, last weekend the re-settlement program for the refugees from Vietnam was completed and the President has drafted a statement which is being run off now and there is also a fact sheet to go with it describing the completion of the refugee program. You will see the statement.

The President, as you know, from the beginning took a great interest in that and said to me this morning that he felt it was one of the most successful and efficient humanitarian programs that the United States has ever run. We will have that for you shortly.

Adam Clymer and a couple of other people have asked for additional information on this little girl from Vermont who was injured in the truck wreck which killed her parents and three sisters. Specifically, Adam and a couple of others have asked if the President was going to send her a Christmas gift.

The President has sent her a little bracelet with the Presidential seal on it and also a doll. The presents were mailed out this morning by air mail special handling so they should get there by Christmas.

Q You want to bet? (Laughter)

Q There is no more air mail.

Q Sent it from here air mail special?

MR. NESSEN: No, he instructed the White House to send it from there.

Q Did you learn any more of the details of that four to five minute conversation?

MR. NESSEN: The President said she was quite shy on the phone and he did most of the talking.

I wouldn't expect we would have any more bills until at least the day after Christmas. The ones that remain are being analyzed in Washington by the Counsel's Office and so any further bill signings or vetoes will have to await the arrival of that analysis and I think that will certainly not be until the day after Christmas, at least.

Q Has the President talked to Secretary Dunlop? Does he plan to talk to him?

MR. NESSEN: Let me get through with this and come to that, John.

The President doesn't plan to meet with Dick or me tomorrow unless something comes up of some urgent nature. He will, of course, get his morning intelligence report. I would not plan to have a briefing tomorrow unless somebody can think of some important reason to have one.

We will be here and in the office and we will have the list of presents and will be running the ski pool and so forth.

Q Tomorrow is going to be the open ski day?

MR. NESSEN: Right, I am just getting to that. That is another reason I think not to have a briefing.

Q This afternoon will we be having any postings or briefings?

MR. NESSEN: Since I have already told you about dinner and church, I don't anticipate actually posting anything, but you might check here at 5 o'clock. Aside from working out a pool arrangement, I don't see any reason to. I will be in the office all day.

Q The dinner tonight -- is that for the whole family or just the President and Mrs. Ford?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think for the whole family.

Q Where?

MR. NESSEN: At the Kindel house.

Let me say one thing about evening pools. When he goes out to dinner in the evening and the travel pool goes with him and comes back here at 10 o'clock or so to file a pool report, I have been having a girl in the office here to take the pool report. I wonder if we could work out an arrangement where the pool reporter could work out his own arrangements and type it for you and post it. The Xerox machine is in the office back there and you can use that. I think we better not do that tonight on the church as that will be longer than a pool report. So we will have someone for that.

Q What time does the pool gather for that?

MR. NESSEN: Thym will work that out on departure for dinner and departure for church.

Tomorrow is the day when there is open coverage of the skiing, as you say. Thym is also going to work out the arrangements for that. If some of you recall last year, there are various pre-positions on the way down the hill and there is a pre-position at the top, I think, and then there is somebody designated as a skiing pooler, I believe. But anyhow, it will be similar to last year and Thym will work it out and make sure that those involved know.

If I recall, last year, I think, we had a sign-up list where people could put down their preference where they wanted to be posted, either half way up, at the top, skiing or whatever. I guess we will do the same thing.

Q How early in the morning is that going to be? Will that disrupt the President's Christmas presents opening?

MR. NESSEN: You mean having to take your position at the top of the hill at 6 o'clock? It won't disrupt his Christmas presents opening, it might disrupt yours.

Q No, I am serious. What time?

MR. NESSEN: I think the same as today, 9:30 or 10:00.

I think what we did last year was you have to go to the top before the lift opens,

Q It is 7:15 on Christmas morning we all go to the top of the mountain to watch the President ski?

MR. NESSEN: And, obviously, it is purely voluntary. There is no mandatory requirement that you go anywhere.

Q The presents are opened first before the skiing?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Will this take place at Lion's Head?

MR. NESSEN: The skiing?

Q Yes. He will come down Simba, I guess?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know about all of that.

Q How will we fight the line of traffic unless we go up at 6:00 or 7:00?

MR. NESSEN: Last year everybody went up and pre-positioned, and they also have some snow cats I think.

Q That is the top.

Q How do you get there before the lift opens?

MR. NESSEN: Thym will work that out. You don't have to go if you don't want to.

Q You could end up getting there at 7:30 and waiting until 10:00.

MR. NESSEN: Thym will work out those arrangements.

To answer John's question about the Dunlop matter --

Q Just before that, you know the weather has been pretty warm. Has the President expressed any view about the bad skiing weather and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: Quite the opposite, he felt the snow where he was skiing was good. He enjoyed it and the people skiing with him that I talked to last night, Pepe and Henri Patty said the skiing was good.

Q On the list procedures, last night you put out a question on turns, reportedly there was a call out. I wasn't called and several people here were never called.

MR. NESSEN: We did call out. The first priority we gave was to the two wires and the three networks and I think Mutual was here already and I think we managed to locate most of those people and then the telephone ladies simply went down the list and called everybody on the list.

Q That is not so, I was never called and there was no message at my room.

MR. CARLSON: I think there was a screw up last night, I will check with the girls and see that it doesn't happen again.

MR. NESSEN: They said they called everybody.

On John Dunlop, the President considers John Dunlop to be an extremely valuable member of his Administration and the President certainly hopes that John Dunlop does not resign.

Q Can I follow that up?

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish.

The President considers John Dunlop to be an extremely valuable member of his Administration and certainly hopes that John Dunlop does not resign and the President has received no resignation from John Dunlop.

It was a tough decision to make, a tough call. The President outlined at some length his reasons for making the decision and those are on the record and you know what they are and there is not much I can add to them today. That is where it stands.

Q Have they talked directly about the possibility that Dunlop will resign or the fact he is thinking it over in light of what the President said?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q They haven't had personal conversations?

MR. NESSEN: Not on that subject. Of course they have had personal conversations.

Q Has the President expressed this sentiment that you have given to us to John Dunlop either person to person or over the telephone?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there was any reason to express it to John Dunlop directly. Dunlop knows this and knows the President wants him to stay in the Cabinet.

Q Did the President, when he was telling Dunlop of his decision, make any overtures for Dunlop to stay in the Administration?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't in the meeting and I don't know precisely what transpired.

Q Ron, the head of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, accused the President of having gone back on his word in first of all promising to sign this bill and then declining to do so? Do you have a reaction to this?

MR. NESSEN: Only to say, Bob, the President's reasons for taking the actions he did are spelled out at length and clearly and I can't add anything to them.

Obviously he stands by what he said the other day.

Q Is there a reaction to Meany's remarks, though?

MR. NESSEN: He stands by his statement he made explaining why he decided to veto it.

Q Has the President decided he would rather have John Dunlop resign than have common situs in the law?

MR. NESSEN: The President doesn't see it as an either/or choice.

Q You say John Dunlop is aware.

Q What part was the tough call?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, the tough call involved the issues in the bill itself.

Q Ron, the President obviously, as you have indicated today, is aware of the stories that he might resign.

MR. NESSEN: What I said to him was that on the front page of the Rocky Mountain News is a story about John Dunlop and I will be asked about it. What should I say? John asked me the anticipated question and I told

Q He must have a few friends over there in Labor that might ask him what he is going to do. Has there been any effort by the White House to contact Labor, or to contact Dunlop?

MR. NESSEN: There has been no direct indication from John Dunlop that he plans to resign.

Q What about indirect?

MR. NESSEN: The Rocky Mountain News has what purports to be an indirect expression of how John Dunlop is spending the next two weeks and the President has seen that indirect --

Q What story is that?

MR. NESSEN: It quotes an associate -- Well, you can see the Rocky Mountain News. There is one right there.

Q When did they last talk, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know the last time they talked was right after -- What day did he announce? Friday?

Friday was the last time they talked as far as I know.

Q Before or after he announced he was going to veto the bill?

MR. NESSEN: Before he announced but after he made the decision.

Q When did he make the decision to veto the bill?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see -- I have lost track of the days.

When did the President announce he would veto?

Q Monday.

MR. NESSEN: All right, he made the decision on Monday. There was an Economic Policy Board meeting. Right after that he asked John Dunlop to come into his office. They talked and right after that the President made the announcement. The last time they talked was Monday.

Q Why wouldn't the President, if he doesn't want Dunlop to stay and considers him as valuable as you have told us, ask Dunlop himself directly to do it rather than putting out a statement?

MR. NESSEN: Lou, I wasn't in that meeting on Monday, so I don't know what the discussion was on Monday but John Dunlop has not indicated to the President directly that he has any thoughts of resigning.

Q Is it conceivable that the President did then ask Dunlop to stay on?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't in the meeting.

Q Can you find out, Ron? That is a very important point.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I will.

Q There has been speculation that some of the President's campaign officials in the oil producing States may bow out if he signs the energy bill, which he did, and John Towers' name will be included in that. Has he had any communication with campaign people who are resigning and are distressed over the signing of this bill?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q In view of the President's very light schedule here and in view of the fact you and Cheney are the only two staff people out here --

MR. NESSEN: Scowcroft also.

Q What is Mr. Cheney doing for the President? What role is he performing out here?

MR. NESSEN: There is a lot of paper that always comes from Washington, still comes from Washington, and Cheney has to sit down once or twice a day with the President. He may meet with the President again this afternoon for another go-round on the paperwork. In addition, there are details that are happening in Vail which Dick has to sit down and get decisions on.

Q You mean like social events?

MR. NESSEN: And other events, yes.

Q Has the President contacted Welch's widow, by any chance, or sent any condolences to her?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check on that.

Q Also, Jack Anderson has a report of a confidential meeting Kissinger had with the Republican leaders and Kissinger is supposed to have told the Republicans that Mao Tse Tung told Ford Teng would be his successor.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything about that.

Q Yes?

MR. NESSEN: Helen says Jack Anderson has a story claiming there was a meeting between Henry Kissinger and a group of Republicans and Henry told them Teng Hsiao-ping would be Mao's successor. I don't have anything on that.

Q The services tonight, since there is apparently only one church, is that an inter-faith church and who is presiding?

MR. NESSEN: I will get that for you before church.

Q Secretary Kissinger keeps talking about there will be an American response to the Russian intervention in Angola. What is he talking about when he says that?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, as you know, Secretary Kissinger carries out and speaks for the President's foreign policy and he was enunciating the President's foreign policy yesterday so obviously the President agrees with what he says. He was speaking for the President and I don't have anything to add to what he said yesterday.

Q Ron, does the President plan to meet with Rumsfeld out here?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, other than socially.

Q Why is Rumsfeld here?

MR. NESSEN: He is on a private vacation, as far as I know.

Q Can you confirm on the record that Richard Welch was the top U.S.. CIA official in Greece?

MR. NESSEN: I can't confirm on the record that he was.

Q Would you deny on the record that he was?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea whether he was.

Dick is wondering whether the report of a newspaper in Athens that Welch was a CIA agent can be confirmed and I said I cannot.

Q I would like to extend that to the fact that officials in Washington were saying that was the case. You say you have no idea whether he was?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Have you asked?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, can I get back to this Dunlop thing for just a second? I was interested when you said you told the President, listen, there's a story on the front page of the Rocky Mountain News, and you said the President hadn't gotten any direct word from Dunlop that he was going to resign. Had he heard these stories that Dunlop might resign? Did this come as news to him?

MR. NESSEN: No, he had seen previous stories that Dunlop might resign.

Q So he wasn't surprised?

MR. NESSEN: No, he wasn't surprised. There was speculation in the press.

Q You are going to check for us?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

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Q Even in the President's statement, the President said he had told Dunlop he would go along and then he later decided against that. Isn't it reasonable to assume he probably asked Dunlop to stay on despite his decision?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't in that meeting but he certainly wants Dunlop to stay.

Q You keep saying you were not in the meeting but you keep telling us what did not happen. How do you know he did not indicate to the President he had thought of resigning?

MR. NESSEN: The President told me.

Q The President said they didn't discuss it?

MR. NESSEN: The President said, "John Dunlop has never told me he was thinking of resigning."

Q Ron, I'm not clear. You don't know if the President has asked Dunlop to stay on?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in a private conversation as opposed to public?

Q You don't know or you are very hesitant.

MR. NESSEN: I say I don't know whether the President said in that meeting, "I want you to stay." But since Dunlop didn't say to him, "I am thinking of leaving", I don't know what the occasion would be for the President to say, "I want you to stay."

Q You don't know whether he said that in fact Monday?

MR. NESSEN: I know Dunlop didn't tell the President he was thinking of resigning.

Q In other words, from what you know of it, the situation is the President has publicly asked Dunlop to stay on but you don't know if he had privately asked him to stay on?

MR. NESSEN: I know the President has not privately asked him but I don't know if Dunlop told him privately he is thinking of leaving.

Q You assume he did not?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know since there was never any indication that he was leaving.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.