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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:48 A.M. MST

DECEMBER 26, 1975

FRIDAY

(Vail, Colorado)

MR. NESSEN: We have a fair amount of stuff.

We are going to be passing out today a Statement by the President and a fact sheet concerning the drug abuse problem in the United States. If you will recall, the other day at the White House the President met with a group of Congressmen who share a concern for the drug problem and as a result of that meeting the President has prepared this statement and fact sheet. This will be distributed here in the briefing room now.

Q Was that Monday?

MR. NESSEN: The meeting with the Congressmen, John, was on Monday.

We will check that.

Q What did he meet with them on?

MR. NESSEN: Their mutual concern about the drug problem in the United States.

The second item today is the President has signed an Executive Order designating John Robson as Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board for the period of calendar year 1976. By law the President must annually designate the Chairman of the CAB and he signed that today.

Q Is Mr. Robson the present Chairman?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is. This is a re-designation as required by law.

The President has signed one additional bill and we will have some paper on this to hand out immediately after the briefing. It is H.R. 8122, the Public Works Appropriation for Water and Power Development and Energy Research. The amount of the bill is \$7,278,712,500 for fiscal 1976, and during the transition quarter \$2,077,533. This is the activities of the Corps of Engineers, the Civil Division of the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, the power agencies which are within the Department of Interior, the Energy Research and Development, administration and several related independent agencies and commissions, and there is a printed release on that which we will give out.

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The next item is the President's schedule for today. He has gone out skiing. He is skiing with four representatives of the U.S. Alpine Ski Team.

Q Officials or members?

MR. NESSEN: Let me give you the names and I will show you how this works.

Alpine skiing refers to downhill and joint slalom skiing. There is another division of skiing which is Nordic and that has to do with cross-country and jumping, but this is the Alpine team. The four people he is skiing with today are Susie Patterson of Sun Valley. She is a skiing member of the team. Also, Hank Tauber of Gloversville, New York. He is the Alpine Director for the U.S. Olympic Team which will go to Innsbruck for the Winter Olympic games this coming year.

The President is also skiing with Graham Anderson of Seattle, who is the Vice President of the U.S. Alpine Ski Team, and with Dick Andrews of San Francisco, the General Manager of the U.S. Alpine Ski Team.

The headquarters of the U.S. Alpine Ski Team is in Park City, Utah.

On the 26th of January, 14 skiers will be selected as the U.S. Alpine Ski Team to compete at Innsbruck. There are currently 28 U.S. skiers at Park City, Utah, training and competing and out of those 28, 14 will be selected to represent the United States. Out of the four people he is skiing with today, Susie Patterson is the one member who is competing for a place on the team. The others are officials.

A little background on today's event. About a month ago, officials of the U.S. Alpine Ski Team were in the White House for a visit and the President met them and afterwards sent them a letter inviting them to join him here for today's skiing. What will happen will be that they will make one or two runs together with the President.

At about Noon today the President will have lunch at the Ski Patrol Headquarters on the mountain with members of the Ski Patrol. It is an annual event during the season and the menu will include elk burgers.

Q Will we have coverage of that?

MR. NESSEN: No, there will be no coverage of the lunch. The ski headquarters are very tiny and there will be no coverage --

Q Where is it located?

MR. NESSEN: On the mountain.

Q How many members?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to ask how many members in the Ski Patrol.

Q How many members having lunch?

Q Did he do this last year?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

It will be the members of the Ski Patrol and the President. The Ski Team will not join them for lunch.

Q May I protest the fact the President obviously knew he would ski with these people today? We were told there would be special photographs, but we were not told why. Why not?

MR. NESSEN: The special photographs were not with the Ski Team. Some people felt the positions yesterday were not the best positions to get good skiing pictures and the President shared that so last night he asked me to arrange for more skiing pictures so the people could get more skiing pictures.

Q How come we didn't know this because we have seen you all morning?

MR. NESSEN: You mean about skiing with the Ski Team?

Q Yes, that is news.

MR. NESSEN: When I went over there I saw the Ski members out in front of the house.

Q You didn't know this?

MR. NESSEN: I knew they would ski sometime but I didn't know it would be today.

Then after lunch the President will make another run or two and will go back to the house for the afternoon.

He has some social plans for the evening which, as soon as I get them all together, we will post at 5 o'clock. The social plans will be posted at 5 o'clock.

Q Outside his home?

MR. NESSEN: He will be leaving this afternoon for a social engagement.

Q Do you know what bill he will be signing?

MR. NESSEN: There is a courier plane coming from Washington with things for him to look at and Cheney has some things for him to look at this afternoon.

Q Does that go to Lowry?

MR. NESSEN: No, it goes to Grand Junction then comes to Avon and then is driven in to town.

Some of you asked if I had a further update on Christmas phone calls the President made or received. I gave some yesterday. I checked this morning and the log shows that he received Christmas phone calls yesterday from Melvin Laird, Bob Hope and his brother, Richard Ford of Grand Rapids.

The outgoing phone calls from the President -- Christmas greetings to Dr. Kissinger and to former President and Mrs. Nixon.

Q When did that happen?

MR. NESSEN: Last evening.

Q How long did the call to the former President and Mrs. Nixon last?

MR. NESSEN: Several minutes.

Q Can you describe at all what they talked about?

MR. NESSEN: It was an exchange of Christmas greetings.

Q Ron, I didn't hear you earlier, when did you announce that?

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't an announcement but it was in the pool report yesterday, I think, and I was in here yesterday and somebody asked me about the calls. The phone calls the day before were to the Vice President, Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, who is spending Christmas with her daughter Lynda in the Washington suburbs, and he returned a call to Billy Graham, who had called several days earlier, and he returned the call the day before yesterday. Maybe that is what he meant about the special connection to get snow. (Laughter)

Q There is a story in the morning papers to the effect the Syrian Government has asked the United States --

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish my announcements, Bob.

I thought you were going to mention the story in the paper today about Mrs. Tully and her mother-in-law and they are here and say they want to see the President about a problem with Mrs. Tully's husband, I believe. Dick Cheney will see Mrs. Tully and her mother-in-law at some point today. The meeting has not been arranged, but when it is, Dick will give me a call, and I will pass on to you, probably at the 5 o'clock posting, I would think, whatever details of that meeting I can.

My assumption is that Dick will tell the wife and mother that they should take the matter through the normal procedure, which is the Pardon Attorney at the Justice Department. Since the meeting has not taken place yet, that is just my assumption of what he will tell them.

Let's see -- moving right along -- during the course of yesterday afternoon some of us were just sitting around here talking and I made reference to a Gallup Poll which showed the President's favorable rating going up five points and I said the President had been told about this and I said my understanding of it was it would be out in a few days. That was incorrect. The poll, I think, actually came out two days ago. I apologize for that. It was purely a misunderstanding on my part.

The next thing--is there any interest in having a TV set installed here for the weekend football games?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: All right, we will work on that.

Q And a better table for the card players?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I am very, very pleased to make the next announcement -- that is, the President is announcing today that he has appointed John Carlson to be the Deputy Press Secretary to the President succeeding Bill Greener, who, as you know, has been nominated and confirmed as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. We have a biography on John which we will pass out after this briefing.

The President personally congratulated John this morning, welcomed him to his new post, expressed complete confidence in John and respect for John and the reputation John has built up at the White House.

I couldn't agree more with the President's assessment. I think John is going to be a tremendous addition to the management of the Press Office. He certainly has my full backing and support.

The relationship I will have with John, I hope, will be as close as possible to the relationship that Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld had when Don was at the White House -- the interchangeable deputy system, which means John speaks with the same authority, has the same information, has the same access to the President, has the same access to whatever senior policy meetings he wants to attend. He will attend all the meetings either in my place or with me.

John, I think you all know, has been tremendously helpful to reporters over the years because of his great wealth of information on domestic matters and now he will have even more information. He will be able to answer your questions with the same knowledge and authority that I have. He is also going to help me get the place organized, I hope.

John has managerial background, both in private industry and in the military. John and I have worked out a plan where he will take over a good deal of the paper workload and the day-to-day administration and that will leave me more time to spend with the President, attending meetings, gathering information, and, more importantly, will leave more time for me to spend with reporters.

I do anticipate there may be another change or two in the Press Office. I don't have anything to announce today. The change or two will be designed to further improve the operation of the Press Office. I don't have a replacement for John, who was Assistant Press Secretary in the domestic area, but we are working on that. Meanwhile, to fill that gap, John will try to do both jobs, the deputy job and also keep his hand in on details of the President's domestic programs.

Q Is he physically moving into Greener's office?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Just to give you some idea of the procedure of how John was selected, when I found out Bill Greener was going to the Pentagon, I talked to a number of people both in the White House and out of the White House, in journalism and out of journalism, and asked whether they were interested in being considered for the job. Some were, some were not. Among those who said they were interested in being considered, I drew up a list of about eight names, which I think reduced to four names. With that list of four names, I consulted with Cheney and with the President and the unanimous first choice from that list was John Carlson.

I am delighted and I am sure you share my pleasure that John is going to take this job.

Q What does it pay?

MR. NESSEN: In the range of \$40,000 to \$42,000. He is worth every penny of it.

Q Can't you tell us the exact figure?

MR. NESSEN: Since this five percent pay raise, I don't know the exact figure, but he is worth every penny of it, whatever it is.

Q We will see.

MR. NESSEN: I think you know already. (Laughter)

With that brief warm-up, I don't think we have any further announcements.

Q Can I start my question again?

MR. NESSEN: On Syria, we don't have any information on it and no comment on it.

Q What was the question?

MR. NESSEN: There was a story in the paper today that contained a report -- if I can summarize it, Bob, my understanding of the report was that there had been considerable anti-Communist feelings in recent days in Syria which had resulted, I think, in some arrests and a turning against the Soviet Union and, I think, a turning towards the United States. In case, if that is an accurate description of the report in the paper, we don't have any information on that and, therefore, I have no comment.

Q That is not really what I was going to ask about. There is another paragraph in that story which says the Syrian Government has approached the United States Government and asked for food supplies and food aid. That was the part I was asking about.

MR. NESSEN: I checked this morning with the NSC and the State Department, and we don't have any information on it.

Q The other day when we questioned you about the Dunlop matter, you indicated that you were going to check and see whether the President, in his Monday meeting with Dunlop, had talked to him about staying on.

MR. NESSEN: I did check and the answer is that it was a private meeting between the two of them and I don't feel free to discuss the details of what they talked about other than to reiterate what I said the other day, which is that Dunlop has not directly indicated to the President any intention to resign.

Q Can you indicate -- if I can follow that, please -- can you indicate, without reference to any specific meeting, whether the President has made any kind of private communication to Dunlop asking him to stay on, as you did the other day publicly?

MR. NESSEN: The only occasion he would have had to talk about it was at that meeting. It was a private meeting and I don't feel I can go into what they talked about.

Q On this Syrian story, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State was in Syria last week, as you no doubt know. I think what you are saying is that that story about their request for food aid is not accurate because, if it did in fact happen, you would know about it.

MR. NESSEN: I assume I would, yes.

Q The fact is the White House knows of no such request?

MR. NESSEN: We have no information on it.

Q Ron, can you confirm that the President's next speech will be January 5 in St. Louis to the Farm Bureau?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce on that today, John.

Q As long as we are going back over the speeches, do you want to correct anything else you said yesterday about the number of times he will be appearing in each State, and so on?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q How could you have gone so wrong on the Gallup Poll? All of us in the networks and, I think, the newspapers as well went pretty hard with that. It was not just a casual statement that you dropped --

MR. NESSEN: My mistake was -- I meant I was there when the President was told there was some good news. I thought he was told there was some good news coming from the Gallup Poll. It turned out the good news had already come, but I had not seen it up to that point.

Q The figures 44 to 49 were not accurate?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't give those figures, I said a five point rise and somebody said what was it. I said I didn't know what it was to start with and somebody said they thought it was 44, but I didn't give that figure.

I remember saying I didn't know what the base figure was that the five point rise was based on. Somebody else said they thought it was 44.

Q Before coming out here the President issued more strong warnings to the Soviet Union about their involvement in Angola. Secretary Kissinger issued similar warnings and I guess on Christmas Eve -- or Christmas Day -- the Soviets openly rebuffed those warnings with a quote to the effect that the force of the national liberation struggle of the people is an important principle of the Soviet foreign policy, et cetera -- in other words, told the President where he could go as far as Angola is concerned. What is the President's reaction to the Soviet statement on Angola?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have the President's views on Angola and I don't have anything to add to them today.

Q The President's position on Angola has since been rebuffed and rejected by the Soviet Union. Where does that leave the President on detente?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to add to what he has said already and what Secretary Kissinger said in his behalf.

Q Ron, I don't want to belabor a point you apologized to us on, but did you know about this last night? There were some people apparently who got this corrected last night. There are a number of us who have this story of the incorrect poll in the papers this morning.

I would like to know, when you learned of it and if you learned it was incorrect, why you didn't call these people whom you told --

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to be announcing poll results. I was sitting around here and we were sort of talking casually, I thought, and kind of kicking political things around, and I mentioned that in a casual way and certainly not as an announcement but just something somebody mentioned to the President.

Q You obviously wanted people to use it. As the Press Secretary to the President, you came over here talking to reporters, it ended up in a pool report.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know you made pool reports of casual conversations.

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Q I didn't make a pool report. You were sitting here in the Press Room. You were not sitting in a bar having a conversation. You did tell us something and you are the Press Secretary to the President.

What I am asking, when you found the information was incorrect -- and I can understand your making the mistake -- but why didn't you call those people at least who were here and tell those people the information was incorrect and let them change their story?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall who was here. It was not an announcement. It was, I thought, a casual conversation. I didn't know it was going to be in a pool report.

I certainly will stop talking about polls from now on.

Q Couldn't you have put it on the board, the information you just told us? You know we are coming out every day and a lot of people more often than that. Couldn't you have put the information on the board this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I should have.

Q You are telling us it was just a foul-up, a mistake, you didn't mean anything, and you were not trying to float anything?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly was not. We were just chatting, I thought.

Q You just thought the poll was one thing and it was something else?

MR. NESSEN: The mistake, Bob, was that I thought, based on the way it was told the President, that the poll would be out in a few days, or over the weekend. The mistake I made, and apparently the mistake the person made who was talking to the President was the poll had been out a couple of days.

Q The President was misinformed, too?

MR. NESSEN: My impression was there was going to be good news in the Gallup poll.

Q Who told the President?

MR. NESSEN: One of the staff.

Q Can you tell me what the President said this morning when you said that Christmas gift we talked about yesterday, the Gallup poll, was not a Christmas gift, it was a lump of coal?

MR. NESSEN: A lump of coal? (Laughter)

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Q The good news of yesterday turned out to be no news at all. What did he say about that when he heard it today?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't discuss it with him today. The essential findings of the Gallup poll are as I said they were, which was a five percent rise in his approval rating. My mistake was I thought it was coming out in the next few days, but it came out two days ago.

He had not seen it and neither had I, nor apparently had the person that was telling him.

Q Is there any private polling the President is having done for himself?

MR. NESSEN: The White House is not doing any private polling.

Q Not even with the coming campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I think the RNC does some polling and the PFC does some polling but there is no money in the White House for polling.

Q Do you know what the figures were when they came out a few days ago?

MR. NESSEN: I do now.

Q What were they?

MR. NESSEN: Am I making an announcement on behalf of the Gallup organization again?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that it is 41 to 46.

Q What does that mean? Your understanding was it was coming out this weekend. You know for sure it was 41 to 46 that came out a few days ago?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, I am going to stop talking about polls. I should have stopped talking about polls a long time ago. I should never have started talking about polls.

I wasn't talking about it in the sense of making an announcement. I was sitting here, I thought, having a casual bull session.

Q This is one thing we have to get clear.

MR. NESSEN: No more bull sessions.

Q The thing is, people lose out if they don't get some of the gems you drop here.

MR. NESSEN: Apparently everybody would have been happy not to have gotten that gem.

Q If there had been a five percent drop in the President's rating --

MR. NESSEN: Somebody would have told the President, "We have bad news for Christmas, Mr. President."

Q You tell us those things in casual conversation and --

MR. NESSEN: I won't anymore.

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Q What will you have, a sign that says "bull session?"

Q We want you to come out and talk, but everybody should be alerted.

MR. NESSEN: Do a call-out saying Nessen is about to have a bull session.

Q Ron, that is serious. There are a lot of nice little tidbits you drop in those things. Is there any way afterwards you can post what you have to say?

MR. NESSEN: There was a pool report made, I am told.

Q Also that report included the telephone calls the President made yesterday, including the call to the Nixons. I didn't see that.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't get the phone log until this morning, Walt, beyond the three I talked about yesterday.

Q Do you think he talked politics to Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was an exchange of Christmas greetings.

Aldo.

Q Did you announce yesterday in the bull session that the President has decided to go to Florida once and New Hampshire once?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't announce it. Again, it was a bull session.

Q Has that decision been made that he is only going in each State one time?

MR. NESSEN: I said he wasn't going to travel very much, he would probably go once or no more than a couple of times.

Q It has been decided he isn't going very often, but it hasn't been decided he will only go once?

MR. NESSEN: The exact number of times has not been decided.

Q I am not clear on what you are now telling us.

MR. NESSEN: Neither am I.

Q This is a kind of special circumstance, in view of the fact this information that was conveyed turned out to be wrong.

Do you have some kind of idea now that you could tell us of what he is going to be doing in these first two primaries? The number of times --

MR. NESSEN: Lou, nothing new other than what the White House has been saying for a couple of weeks; that is, that he will not do much campaigning in the primary season. There is nothing new about that. The exact number of times he will go to New Hampshire, Florida, and the other States, once or twice, it hasn't really been decided.

Q Do you anticipate he will go skiing in New Hampshire?

MR. NESSEN: He doesn't have any plans to go skiing in New Hampshire. We talked casually about it last night and it hasn't been decided. I would say it is something he is thinking about.

Q He is thinking about going skiing in New Hampshire?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q During the one visit there?

MR. NESSEN: It would be in conjunction with a visit to New Hampshire. It wouldn't be a trip to go skiing. If he goes up there and stays over, he will possibly ski. It is at a very nebulous stage, and I think last night was the first time he mentioned it to me and he didn't indicate he was near a decision on it.

Q Is this for vote-getting?

MR. NESSEN: The skiing?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No, that would be for enjoyment.

Q He would do a little campaigning while he was there?

MR. NESSEN: As he skis down?

Q Ron, the Secretary of Defense is out here, He came out here on a Government plane. Is he doing any business here?

MR. NESSEN: No, not with the President, he is not. He has met the President at social events, but I am not aware of any business. He is on a private vacation.

Q He is on a private vacation but he came on a Government plane, Is he reimbursing the Government?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever the proper manner is to reimburse the Government for his flight, under Treasury or IRS rules -- he will follow that. I don't know what the proper method is, but he will follow the method that they decree.

Q You know he is reimbursing the Government?

MR. NESSEN: He is following whatever the required procedure is.

Q Has the President decided that he can win more votes by staying in the White House rather than by openly campaigning?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think the decision was made on the basis of how do you get more votes. As he said on the day he announced he was a candidate, his first responsibility is to be President and he has work to do.

Q He does want to win, doesn't he?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't be surprised to find he would like to be elected, yes.

Q Ron, this pool report yesterday quotes you as saying that you expected Ford to visit New Hampshire and Florida one time each and it has one time each in quotes. You told us this morning it hadn't really been decided. There seems to be a conflict. Are you repudiating the pool report? Can you clear this up?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying the definite plans have not been made, but that I think he will be going once, maybe twice.

Q Each?

MR. NESSEN: Each.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much.

END

(AT 11:22 A.M. MST)