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NEWS CONFERENCE

#405

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH JOHN CARLSON

AT 10:37 A.M. EST

DECEMBER 31, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. CARLSON: Good morning.

Ron is meeting with the President right at this moment so rather than keep you waiting I thought I would come down for a few moments to go over everything we know -- everything that has happened since last night -- and bring you up to date.

As I think most of you know, the President returned at 6:25 last evening from Vail and at 6:45 began a meeting with Secretary Coleman, John McLucas, the Administrator of the FAA, Harold Tyler, the Deputy Attorney General, John Adams, the Deputy Director of the FBI. They met for an hour and ten minutes and Ron Nessen gave a brief read-out following the meeting and we will have a transcript available here this morning, hopefully before noon.

Just trying to sum up that meeting in case some of you were not here, I think most of you were probably not here, McLucas and Secretary Coleman gave a report to the President on a meeting held earlier that day. Officials of DOT, FAA, FBI, the Air Transport Association, the Airport Operators Council, the Port Authority of New York and Customs officials all met earlier in the day and discussed a number of steps to reinforce security at airports and on airplanes.

Tyler and Adams then gave the President a report on the progress of the investigation to date and they told the President at this time they don't know who is responsible for the bombings or why. Three hundred FBI agents have been involved in the investigation--that includes bomb experts. And there will be additional agents joining the investigation as it spreads around the country.

The President praised the New York authorities for their skills and was told that the FAA has already taken some steps to improve security at over 500 airports throughout the United States.

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The President again expressed his shock at the incident and expressed his sympathy to the victims. The President has asked for interim reports and on Friday plans to meet with the same group again.

Q What time?

MR. CARLSON: I don't think any time has been set yet, Helen.

For a more complete read-out, Ron's briefing will be available here shortly.

Following the meeting last night at about 8:30, the President called Fran Tarkington and expressed condolences to Mr. Tarkington on the death of his father.

As some of you are probably aware, Dave Broder and Lou Cannon had an interview aboard Air Force One and we hope to have a transcript of that available also today.

Q Was that in the Post?

MR. CARLSON: Yes.

Q John, can you say -- where was Tarkington when you called him?

MR. CARLSON: I don't know. We can probably check for you if you would like.

Q Do you know how long they talked?

MR. CARLSON: It was a very short telephone call.

Q Are you going to make a similar transcript of the President's meeting with 21 reporters at 11:30 this morning?

MR. CARLSON: Sure.

This morning the President presided over the senior staff meeting, as he has been doing for several weeks now. I might give you some of his opening comments.

He started off the meeting by saying in Vail he had a chance to reflect on the past year and he said though there were some disappointments, he thought there were some exceedingly good accomplishments --

Q Excuse me, are you quoting him at this point?

MR. CARLSON: I think that would be a pretty good quote. I should say I am paraphrasing because that is what I recall. He said there were some disappointments, but some exceedingly good accomplishments and he is looking forward optimistically to 1976.

Q Did he catalog either the disappointments or the accomplishments?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think from some of the comments I have heard the President make and, of course, reading the Lou Cannon article, I think he is pleased that inflation has been roughly cut in half, and even though unemployment peaked in May, it is now on the decline. I think when you get a chance to see a transcript of the Cannon-Broder interview, that might give you some more feel.

At 11:30 this morning the President will have what we might call "a conversation with the President" and this will be just another format, another type of interview, a meeting with the President. We have had several different formats and we plan to try different types. The President has met with individuals, he has met with groups of three, he has met with the entire Press Corps in the East Room, he has met on the South Lawn and in the Rose Garden. This is just another format.

Obviously everyone cannot be included in this smaller group and we will have additional meetings like this in the future. If you are not included in this one, we will make sure you are included in future meetings.

Q Can this one be piped in here?

MR. NESSEN: It will not be piped in, but we hope to have a transcript available immediately after, between 2:00 and 3:00, hopefully, and we will do everything we can to get it out more expeditiously and have that as a priority.

Q Is it for immediate release?

MR. CARLSON: Yes, it is.

The President had awaiting him on his return from Colorado, 26 bills. He has over a dozen pending signature and maybe later today we will have more information on that.

The President's phone call to Fran Tarkington was at 8:30 last night and Fran Tarkington was in Athens, Georgia.

Q Do you mean all the rest are not here, the bills, I mean?

MR. CARLSON: They are all here, yes, but not on his desk for signature. The OMB analysis, Domestic Council analysis, is just being finalized.

Q Is he vetoing common situs today?

MR. CARLSON: He might. That is not finalized yet.

Q That dozen you mentioned are out of the 26?

MR. CARLSON: Yes, 26 total.

Q You mean a dozen are about ready for signature?

MR. CARLSON: I am saying later today, as soon as possible, so you can have some New Year's Eve time, we will be able to post. The President has signed these bills.

Today, at around 3:00, the President will tape a message for the beginning of the Bicentennial year. The President will video tape a Bicentennial message to the American people from the Oval Office at 3:00 p.m.

Q Is that the one we got the text of out in Vail?

MR. CARLSON: No.

Q When is that for release?

MR. CARLSON: Six o'clock p.m. CBS is the network pool and will handle the taping. Anyone interested in obtaining an audio or film tape of the message should contact Bill Galbraith of CBS and we will have copies of the release available here shortly.

Q Is this a New Year's Eve message?

MR. CARLSON: No, a Bicentennial year -- 6:00 p.m. release.

Q Is that described as a nonpolitical speech or message?

MR. CARLSON: Yes.

His Excellency Yitzak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, has accepted President Ford's invitation to visit the United States from January 27 to February 4. In addition to having discussions with the President and others in Washington, Prime Minister Rabin will visit several other cities.

The President and Mrs. Ford look forward to receiving Prime Minister and Mrs. Rabin on this visit, which will serve to symbolize the close relationship between Israel and the United States.

The visit will provide an opportunity for the President and the Prime Minister to discuss in depth the current situation in the Middle East.

Just to give you a little bit more information, the Prime Minister last visited Washington in September of 1974 and June of 1975. This is his third visit to the United States.

O What was that date again, John, please, the last visit?

MR. CARLSON: September and June, 1975.

O What are the other cities he is visiting?

MR. CARLSON: We don't have all the details of his itinerary yet.

Q Will he also address a joint meeting of the Congress, as his Egyptian predecessor did?

MR. CARLSON: We don't have the details yet, Peter.

Continuing, a couple of other things.

For New Year's Eve, the President plans to spend a quiet evening here at the White House, with a few friends, perhaps. We don't have the details yet.

O We were just told it was a twosome.

Q No friends?

MR. CARLSON: Well, no friends, then.

Q We would like to know what it is.

MR. CARLSON: We will give you the details.

As you know, Monday is a trip to St. Louis. Later this afternoon we will be putting up a sign-up list. Just to give you a rough idea of the times we are thinking of, the press plane to St. Louis will be off about 8 a.m., with check-in at about 7:30.

Air Force One will depart at 9:10, arriving at Lambert Field at 10:10. The President will give remarks to the American Farm Bureau Federation. They are expecting about 5,000 in attendance.

Q At what time?

MR. CARLSON: At 11:15.

Q Where?

MR. CARLSON: At Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis.

Q Is that Central time?

MR. CARLSON: Is Missouri on Central time?

Q Yes.

MR. CARLSON: I guess it is Central time.

The President, following the speech, will attend a reception for the American Farm Bureau Federation leadership.

Q Is the speech going to be on agriculture?

MR. CARLSON: I haven't seen the speech yet. I don't know.

The President is due to depart St. Louis about 1:05.

Q We can rule out any news conference?

MR. CARLSON: There might be something else. I wouldn't rule it out, but I certainly wouldn't rule it in.

Q What do you mean, "something else"?

MR. CARLSON: He might have another news conference, something with an anchorman. I just don't know. There is a little room to have one other event.

Q The 1:05 departure from St. Louis is firm?

MR. CARLSON: Yes, quite firm.

Q And right back to Washington?

MR. CARLSON: Yes.

Q Did you say you couldn't tell us what the speech was about?

MR. CARLSON: I don't know yet.

Q Is he going to Arlington Friday for the funeral?

MR. CARLSON: I haven't heard that yet.

Q How about activities for tomorrow and the weekend?

MR. CARLSON: The President is expected to stay in the Washington area. He will not go to Camp David this weekend.

Q Will you brief tomorrow?

MR. CARLSON: No briefing tomorrow.

Q You said the Washington area. Will he leave the White House?

MR. CARLSON: No, he will not go to Camp David. He may do some work in the office tomorrow morning, but I would not expect any briefing.

Q Where is the physical location of today's interview?

MR. CARLSON: In the Oval Office.

Q I am wondering if you people have taken into consideration that quite a few afternoon newspapers do not publish tomorrow and you are penalizing them by not having a pipe into the interview. You lose a lot of afternoon papers by doing that. I wonder if there is any reconsideration of the techniques and ground rules on this?

MR. CARLSON: We can check it for you.

Q Is there anything of any importance amongst these 26 bills?

MR. CARLSON: I would think to some of the people involved in the legislation, they would think it is important.

Q Anything of national importance?

MR. CARLSON: Offhand, I don't recall any bill that would be of national interest.

Q John, is Friday going to be a regular workday and, if so, can you give us an idea of what it might be like?

MR. CARLSON: I don't have the schedule for Friday, but I think it will be a regular workday.

Q Regular briefing?

MR. CARLSON: Regular briefing, and additional bills will have been signed.

Q Any thoughts about Saturday and Sunday?

MR. CARLSON: No thoughts.

Q Will you be here tomorrow?

MR. CARLSON: Yes, I will be here tomorrow.

Q Is Ron coming down?

MR. CARLSON: Do you want him? (Laughter)

I don't believe he was planning to come down. We have no other announcements.

Q I have a question. Why does the President think Governor Reagan would consider the Vice Presidency if Mr. Rockefeller doesn't want it?

MR. CARLSON: Say it again?

Q Why does the President think Governor Reagan would consider the Vice Presidency if Mr. Rockefeller doesn't want it?

MR. CARLSON: I believe that Governor Reagan has expressed his comment on the subject.

Q I will be covering Reagan in New Hampshire next week. I am interested in the President, not Reagan. What about the President? Why does he think that Mr. Reagan would consider the Vice Presidency, John, if Mr. Rockefeller has disdained this office?

MR. CARLSON: I haven't heard the President's comments on that. I don't know.

Q This meeting on the airport security on Friday, will that be for him to order some new -- or take some actions?

MR. CARLSON: They are to bring recommendations back to him.

Q Question.

MR. CARLSON: What is the purpose of this meeting on Friday? Friday they are to come back to the President with recommendations on the airport security measures, the improvements in the airport security measures they are taking and I am sure we will have a fill-in on that following the meeting.

Q Excuse me. Recommendations for measures or notification?

MR. CARLSON: The FAA says they have already taken some measures to improve security at over 500 airports, and they are going to come back with additional recommendations, additional steps, and they will keep the President fully informed.

Q Do you have any comment on the attempted break-in at the President Ford Committee headquarters?

MR. CARLSON: I do not. I think Peter Kaye or Bo Callaway have some comments or should react to that.

Q Does the White House have any indication from any source whatsoever as to who may have been responsible for that bombing at LaGuardia?

MR. CARLSON: The FBI gave a report last night to the President. They have no indication of who is responsible.

Q Why did he compliment the Port Authority? What did they do that was so great?

MR. CARLSON: I wasn't in the meeting, but it is a New York City responsibility. New York City is in charge of the investigation, and the FBI is merely helping coordinate the activities and I guess the FBI mentioned to the President, the New York authorities were moving as rapidly as possible and had mobilized their entire force and so forth and were doing everything that could be done.

Q You are referring to the New York City authorities, not the Port Authority of New York, right?

MR. CARLSON: New York City authorities.

Q Was Ron's concern -- which was widely reported -- over the pictures of the President falling in the snow, was this due in any way to the President's feelings or Ron's own reaction entirely?

MR. CARLSON: Les, Ron wandered in the Press Office that day and very nonchalantly, I believe, mentioned those comments, and it was purely Ron's comments, not the Presidents.

Q The President has expressed no such comments?

MR. CARLSON: None at all.

Q Was he upset with what his Press Secretary had said?

MR. CARLSON: I heard him express no discontent.

Q Does he agree with what the Press Secretary said?

MR. CARLSON: I don't know, Phil. I haven't asked him.

Q About these steps you say the FAA has already taken to improve security, did they indicate what they were?

MR. CARLSON: I think they may have discussed them with the President. I was not in the meeting, but those steps will not be discussed publicly.

Q They won't be discussed publicly?

MR. CARLSON: No.

Q Do you want to tell us how the lucky 20 folks get chosen?

MR. CARLSON: I am not sure. I think there was a list put together and the President approved the final list.

Q Any particular grounds, Bureau Chiefs or --

MR. CARLSON: I am not aware of all the details.

MR. ROBERTS: We will pipe it in.

Q Does this mean the people in there are going to get scooped?

MR. CARLSON: There should be no filing until the end of the interview.

Q You cannot use a tape recorder out here?

MR. ROBERTS: The problem is it is not being recorded anywhere.

Q But they will be piped in?

MR. ROBERTS: It will be piped into the sound system.

Q People out here can file before those in there?

MR. CARLSON: We should lay the ground rules down now that no one can file until the meeting is completed. That is enough, isn't it?

Q Until the others return here?

MR. CARLSON: As soon as they walk in the door, you all go file.

Q Is there a time on this meeting, or is it openended?

MR. CARLSON: I think less than an hour.

Q Has he ever received the report from the Secret Service on the break-in to the White House grounds?

MR. CARLSON: I think Dick Cheney received that report.

Q Has the President seen it?

MR. CARLSON: I don't know. I will check it for you.

Q Senator Proxmire noted the Air Force records showed Secretary Simon took 58 Air Force flights, costing \$328,000. I wonder, does the President regard this as an example of economy in Government? Does he have any comment on it? Does he care about it?

MR. CARLSON: I have heard no comments.

Q Is it possible to get some inquiry as to whether he thinks it is appropriate for the Secretary of the Treasury, who is pleading for economy, to take all these flights?

MR. CARLSON: I think the President has --

Q Did he say something in Vail on this?

MR. CARLSON: No, but I think the President relies on the judgment of his Cabinet Secretaries.

Q He thinks this is good judgment?

MR. CARLSON: If Secretary Simon thinks it is good judgment, I think it is up to the Secretary.

Q How many reporters will be in this thing at
11:30?

MR. CARLSON: I think approximately 22 or 23.

Q Number one, will there be any mult available
on this thing?

MR. CARLSON: No.

Q Is any recording of it allowed?

MR. CARLSON: I assume you can record it for
your own purposes, but not for broadcast.

Q Will there be a loudspeaker somewhere where
it can be listened to while it is on?

MR. CARLSON: Right here.

Q It will not be for audio?

MR. CARLSON: No.

MR. ROBERTS: At the end of the interview, about
noon, there will be a photo in the Oval Office, silent
photo.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 10:58 A.M. EST)