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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH JOHN G. CARLSON

AT 11:30 A.M. EST

JANUARY 15, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. CARLSON: Good morning.

I might just first point out there has been an addition to the President's schedule. At 2 o'clock this afternoon he will be meeting with Vice President Rockefeller and this is essentially a continuation of yesterday's meeting.

Because of numerous requests, there will be a photo of the President working on the State of the Union this afternoon at 3:30 and we will have a pool list posted shortly.

Q Who requested that?

MR. CARLSON: Several magazines, newspapers and I think even a network.

Q Not ours. (Laughter)

Q Tell us about the Rocky meeting.

MR. CARLSON: I have no information. They meet on a regular basis, Fran, and we don't have an agenda.

Q Was yesterday's meeting cut short?

MR. CARLSON: I don't think so. They had a lot of items and just didn't finish.

I have no other announcements. I might just point out, because there has been some interest in the comments by the FEC -- this is about all the information I can give you at this time -- Mr. Philip Buchen, Counsel to the President, has been in touch with the Federal Elections Commission this morning and there will be a meeting this afternoon between Mr. Buchen and their counsel--FEC counsel -- and Mr. Curtis, the Chairman.

Q What time is that meeting?

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MR. CARLSON: Probably late this afternoon, Bob. The time is not firm yet.

Q Here or there?

MR. CARLSON: It will be over there.

The purpose of the meeting is to explore their concerns and explore their questions. From our standpoint, it will be essentially a listening session. Beyond that, at this point that is all I can give you and all I have.

Q What is the name of that counsel?

MR. CARLSON: The counsel's name is John G. Murphy.

Q Will there be a readout after the meeting?

MR. CARLSON: I would not expect a readout after the meeting, Dick.

Q Is there any concern here at the White House that the President's appointment of Rogers Morton as a Counsellor may indeed be breaking the law? Doesn't the fact Buchen is going to meet with these people indicate some concern here at the White House that Morton may indeed be violating the law?

MR. CARLSON: Walt, I think it is inappropriate to comment when they are going to meet this afternoon.

Q If it does turn out he is breaking the law, will they switch him over to the President Ford Committee payroll?

MR. CARLSON: I think it is safe to say the President and his staff will totally and completely obey the letter and spirit of the law just as we expect all other candidates to do.

Q John, are you indicating that you will be guided by the opinions of this counsel for the Commission if he says "We believe you are violating under the intent or the letter of the law;" that then you will go back and change Morton's status or will you make your own determination independently of what this counsel says?

MR. CARLSON: John, it is premature for me to sit up here and speculate. I really can give you no more than this. We are going over there this afternoon for a listening session and after that point perhaps we may have more information.

Q As of now, does the White House believe the appointment is a proper one?

MR. CARLSON: I will stand on what was said yesterday and leave it at that.

Q Who requested the meeting?

MR. CARLSON: Mr. Buchen called this morning to the counsel.

Q Why did he call?

MR. CARLSON: He wanted to explore their concerns, their questions.

Q Has there been any formal contact from the FEC at all or did you just learn of this meeting?

MR. CARLSON: I know of no contact from the FEC.

Q Why are you calling this a listening session when in fact it is the White House that has to answer questions?

MR. CARLSON: I think, Bob, after we hear their concerns and explore their questions we will come back and perhaps have a response to them. I think I better just leave it where it is now and not speculate on any further acts today.

Q John, going back to the State of the Union, can you tell us what speechwriters are closeted where and what is going on in Williamsburg? Are things being put together, or are there problems with it?

MR. CARLSON: As I understand it, the President now each afternoon has been spending a good deal of time reviewing the State of the Union, the drafts, and basically the President and a couple of speechwriters, including Bob Hartmann, are going over the drafts. It is not a group of eight or nine speechwriters.

Q Is anybody in Williamsburg?

MR. CARLSON: No. Last week, as we mentioned when people asked us, there was a small group down there to pull together the tremendous amount of material that had been gathered.

Q Could Mr. Buchen come out and talk to us when he returns from the meeting this afternoon?

MR. CARLSON: We could check it, Walt, but I would be doubtful.

Q This is very appropriate to all of us.

MR. CARLSON: I know and I think at the appropriate time and after we have had a chance to hear their concerns, we will be making our response known.

Q John, I am told the President, if he were to become involved in any kind of inquiry here, has the option of allowing this entire procedure to be open to the public or to keep it private and secret. Can you tell us at this point whether he would be inclined to go one way or the other?

MR. CARLSON: Dick, really, it is premature to go beyond what I have said now until after we have the meeting this afternoon.

Q I would like to reinforce one thing that was theoretically on the record, although disputed yesterday. Is it still the White House position that Mr. Morton will play only an incidental role in the campaign?

MR. CARLSON: Walt, I don't think I am going to get up here and play semantics with you. Those are not my words, and Secretary Morton also discussed that. Secretary Morton said he felt the job would not be incidental, he thought.

Q This is the big problem, John. I don't mean to pick a fight with you, but Morton did say that, and that was my point. Morton contradicted the claim "incidental" and Ron yesterday stood by it. I want to know if the White House, as it goes into this meeting with Tom Curtis this afternoon, still believes Mr. Morton will play an incidental role in the campaign?

MR. CARLSON: Walt, for me to comment further I think would be premature until after the meeting.

Q John, I have a related question to this. Ron, in the transcript announcing Morton's appointment, twice referred to the Hatch Act. Does the President intend to sign or veto H.R. 8617, which amends the Hatch Act, and Sec. 7325 allows the entire White House staff to engage in political activity in the White House during business hours that has been passed by a voice vote in the House?

What about that? Ron brought it up. He twice mentioned the Hatch Act. I went over that transcript, and I just wonder -- Magee says he hears it is going to be vetoed. Is this true or not? What are you going to do with that?

MR. CARLSON: Okay, stop talking and I will answer.

Q What was the question?

MR. CARLSON: Whether the President will veto the House-passed version of the Hatch Act, is that right?

Q The Hatch Act amendment.

MR. CARLSON: I have not followed this to see what has happened since probably 45 days ago. At that time, the President told Bob Hampton that he would veto the House-passed Hatch Act.

Q In view of Ron's extensive explanations and justifications of this, what in your view -- that is, the Morton "incidental" thing -- what would inhibit the appointment of Bo Callaway as, say, a military counsellor with incidental duties as campaign manager? Would there be anything, in your view, or Ron's view?

MR. CARLSON: I can't answer that.

Q Prior to the announcement of Morton's appointment, did the White House consider the FEC rules, and did it, at the time of the appointment, regard it as being within the letter and the spirit of the FEC rules?

MR. CARLSON: I think Ron answered that, and I think Secretary Morton also did, and yes.

Q John, we are happy to have you here with us today, but can you tell us why Ron is in hiding?

MR. CARLSON: Ron was invited to address the Shreveport, Louisiana Chamber of Commerce this evening.

Q John, would Mr. Buchen consult or confer with FEC counsel to get their questions and concerns if the White House was 100 percent sure that there would be no change in Mr. Morton's announced status?

MR. CARLSON: Ted, I think for me to comment and make all these speculations here just prior to this meeting would not be helpful, so bear with me.

Q Doesn't this leave open the possibility that there would be a change in his designation or a change in who pays all or part of his salary?

MR. CARLSON: Ted, you can make that judgment. I think I will not make any judgment from here.

Q Is anybody going down with Mr. Buchen?

Q A travel pool? (Laughter)

MR. CARLSON: I think there will be one or two others from the White House, other counsel and perhaps someone else.

Q John, can you tell us whether Mr. Buchen's phone call to the FEC was at the direction of the President?

MR. CARLSON: I can't. I assume that he recognized the importance and the needs and so forth. I don't know.

Q What is the status of Richard Ober of the National Security Council, who is under investigation by the Justice Department for possible participation in a break-in?

MR. CARLSON: I don't know. We have stated here that the Justice Department -- we are aware the Justice Department is investigating the Fairfax break-in, and that is all we have acknowledged here.

Q Will you acknowledge that name? Is that the name of the person?

Q John, can you confirm published reports that the President is going to make a two-day political visit to California in March?

MR. CARLSON: I can confirm the President will be in California March 11, possibly overnight. But, there are so many details yet to be worked out that we just have not really gotten the program together.

Q Is the purpose political?

MR. CARLSON: It will be political.

Q Will it be LA and San Francisco?

MR. CARLSON: The details are somewhat fuzzy, Fran.

Q Who will pay for it?

MR. CARLSON: I would expect the President Ford Committee would pay for it.

Q What about the published reports he will be in Florida twice in --

MR. CARLSON: I saw those reports, and I asked this morning, and that is still fuzzy. I would not confirm that. He will be in Florida. The exact dates and times are not set.

Q Can you confirm en route to California he will go to Illinois?

MR. CARLSON: I can't. I don't know that.

Q Where is Mr. Morton today?

MR. NESSEN: He is in Des Moines, Iowa.

Q What is he doing there?

MR. CARLSON: I think he is giving a speech.

Q What kind of speech?

MR. CARLSON: My understanding is it is a political speech, and his expenses are paid for by the President Ford Committee.

Q Can you give us some White House reaction to reports the money the Federal Government is loaning to New York City may indeed not be repaid? Is the White House concerned at all that New York City may not be able to repay this latest installment?

MR. CARLSON: Bill Simon, before he makes any payments to New York City, must make the determination that he has been able to conclude there is reasonable prospect of repayment. This morning I asked him that same question, and he said he had made that conclusion.

Q The President is just taking Simon's word?

MR. CARLSON: The President is receiving regular updates and reports, as is the Congress, on New York City's situation, and as the money flows out, the amount, the timing and so forth.

Q John, the \$2.3 billion that is going to be made available to New York over the next year must come out as a supplemental budget item. It must be budgeted in, and I understand that will be done in March. Does the President expect Congress to cut its expenses by \$2.3 billion to make up for that?

MR. CARLSON: It is my understanding that the money is off budget and as such is not included in the normal appropriation process.

Q Excuse me, but to follow up, that is not the version some Members of the House are saying. They say it definitely has to be a budget item.

MR. CARLSON: The terminology may not be correct here, but the Treasury sells the paper to, I believe, a Federal financing bank and, for that reason, it is not on budget. I should check that to make sure I am completely accurate, but that is my understanding.

Q John, Charlie Goodell held a news conference this morning on the final report of the Clemency Board, and he indicated he personally favors a pending bill in the House to grant amnesty on a case-by-case basis. Do you know the President's position on this?

MR. CARLSON: When the Clemency Board terminated on September 15 officially, the President sent a letter to Charlie Goodell and all the other members of the board and expressed his views at that time. I think we should pull that out for you. It is not fresh in my memory.

THE PRESS: Thank you, John.

END (AT 11:45 A.M. EST)