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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#418

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. EST

JANUARY 19, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: Let me tell you a little about the President's weekend and give you a few other items to start with.

I guess most of you know what his day went like, until about the middle of the day. Then, from about 3:12 Saturday afternoon until 6:15 the President met with members of his staff in groups, in large groups and small groups, to work on his State of the Union speech. That is 3:12 to 6:15.

Then, on Sunday, the President came into the office at 10:09 and again, in various sized groups, worked on the State of the Union until 3:35.

Q Didn't he watch the Super Bowl?

MR. NESSEN: He may have.

He came back to the office at 5:21. He certainly did not watch the first part of it. He came back to the office at 5:21 and worked until 7:30, also on the State of the Union.

You all know he went to the church service this morning at the National Presbyterian Church, and I think you have seen his schedule for today, the National Security Council meeting and so forth.

Now, just to give you an idea of some of the details of the State of the Union and the budget --

Q Ron, before you go into that, one question about this? Is there any chance on Wednesday he will go to the Conference on Religion in the Presidency, where the clergy can ask him questions?

MR. NESSEN: He will not have the opportunity to attend that event.

MORE

#418

Q How is it he had the opportunity to attend this morning but can't go there? They asked him last October.

MR. NESSEN: This is an annual service that coincides with the annual January reconvening of Congress.

Q What time do you expect to get our copies of the speech tonight?

MR. NESSEN: At my most optimistic, I would like to think about 3:00 or 4:00. At my most realistic, I would like to think of 6:00. John errs on the side of realism, and I suppose I do, too. I think the thing to do is watch the wires and to use our recorded phone message here because as soon as we get a more accurate time fix on it, we will announce it.

Q Where does it stand now? Has he completed it?

MR. NESSEN: It is still undergoing some minor final changes, I would say.

Q If you get it at 6:00, will you brief then, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a fact sheet along with the text. It will be embargoed for 9:01. There is no wire embargo on it. I would think that in its delivered form, it would run between 45 minutes and an hour.

Q Do you have a word count? Can you translate it to a word count?

MR. NESSEN: Somewhere between 3,500 and 5,000. I think. Depending on when the text is done, we could arrange a briefing. I think maybe what we ought to do is wait and see when we get the text and whether at that hour a briefing would be useful. We hope to get it out in time to also be able to have a briefing.

Q Who will conduct the briefing, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Tentatively, Alan Greenspan, Jim Lynn, if he can, and perhaps Jim Cannon, depending on what their afternoon schedules look like at the time the text is ready to hand out.

Q Would we be locked in with the briefing --

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how we can lock anybody in, or out, either, for that matter.

I have never seen any successful way to do that.

Now, on the budget. Anybody who does not have a White House pass should get their budgets at the EOB. Three documents -- the budget itself; the appendix, which is the big, thick one; and the special analysis -- will be handed out at 10:00 p.m. tonight. There will be a wire embargo until 8 a.m. in the morning, and the embargo for release or publication until 10:00 a.m. Wednesday.

The briefing will be at 9:30 tomorrow at the State Department auditorium. The briefing will be done by the President himself. He will have his full Cabinet, or as many Cabinet members as are in town, tomorrow morning at 9:30 with him.

The President will leave here at about 9:20 to go to the briefing in the State Department. There will be a travel pool, which should meet here at about 9:00.

Q Is everything that the President says also embargoed?

MR. NESSEN: Everything the President says is embargoed until 10:00 a.m. Wednesday. It will be open for full coverage, and your normal press credentials will get you into the State Department.

For the TV cameras who may want to set up early, the doors will open in the State Department Auditorium at 6:00 a.m. You should be completely set up at 7:15. Then, as you know, they will close the doors and sweep the room, and you can come back in again at 8:15.

Q Last year the President read a statement, and he did not take any questions. Will that be the same this year?

MR. NESSEN: No, he will do the budget briefing.

Q He will take questions?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. That is how a briefing works.

Q That is embargoed until Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: Until 10:00 a.m. Wednesday.

Q But there is actual wire movement at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Embargoed, yes. You can move the budget copy on the wires, starting at 8:00 a.m. -- in other words, tomorrow -- but it should not be published or broadcast until 10:00 a.m. Wednesday, including the briefing the President will conduct tomorrow.

Q What time tomorrow will they be handing out the budget? Tomorrow morning?

MR. NESSEN: You mean if you don't want to get it at 10:00 tonight?

Q What time will they be available in the morning?

MR. NESSEN: They will all be piled up here, starting at 10:00 tonight.

Q When you say "here," do you mean the press room here, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: In this room, the briefing room.

Q They will also be over at the New EOB on the mezzanine?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Will the Presidential remarks tomorrow be piped in here?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, embargoed, though.

Q Ron, presumably we are free to report now that he is going to do this briefing?

MR. NESSEN: I think so.

Q You raised the problem of his remarks embargoed, but yet it is going to be on the schedule and everything else.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why is he doing the briefing?

MR. NESSEN: Mostly because --

Q Because Harry Truman did it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think Harry Truman did it, but in any case, primarily because he probably knows as much about the budget and the process of putting it together and what is in it than anybody, so it was decided he ought to answer the questions. He has, as you know, spent over 100 hours on the budget.

Q Have you figured out how many hours he has spent on the State of the Union?

MR. NESSEN: We did not, Walt.

Q Ron, last year the President did his little thing and we could report that immediately. Why is this being changed?

MORE

MR. NESSEN: Because last year was really kind of a Statement by the President, as somebody pointed out, he did not answer any questions. This is not so much a Statement by the President as it is just the kind of nuts and bolts briefing on the budget and since the budget itself is not for release until 10:00 A.M. Wednesday, I don't see how his answering nitty-gritty questions about it can be published ahead of time.

Q What number do we call to get non-credentialed people into that briefing? Do you have a contact on that?

MR. NESSEN: To get into the State Department?

MR. CARLSON: The back section of the State Department will be reserved for the general public if there is extra room.

Q Ron, your figures on the time the President devoted to the State of the Union Message over the weekend adds up to ten hours and forty-eight minutes. How many individuals did he meet with and how many groups?

MR. NESSEN: For instance, on Saturday he met with -- Governor Ray you know about, Jim Lynn and Alan Greenspan together, Bob Hartmann separately, General Scowcroft separately, Marsh and Greenspan and Hartmann and then a larger meeting of Lynn, Greenspan, Goldwin, Seidman, Cannon, Hartmann, Marsh, Gergen, Jones, Scowcroft and Nessen. Then, on Sunday, Doug Smith, Hartmann and Orben alone. Then Cheney, Orben and Smith joined by Marsh, joined by Friedman, then Baroody. Later in the day. Lynn and O'Neill together, and so forth.

Q Bob Orben you mean?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I am not being facetious, does that mean there will be some funny lines in the State of the Union Message?

MR. NESSEN: I suppose humor is in the eyes of the beholder, but there is no intentional humor in the State of the Union. (Laughter)

Q Can you add up the total amount of hours that the President has spent working on the State of the Union Message?

MR. NESSEN: We have tried and we have not been very successful because some of the meetings were specifically about the State of the Union, some were focused on specific legislative proposals and so forth. We can make another try at it.

Q Could you give just an order of magnitude?

MR. NESSEN: I would say between fifty and one hundred but maybe I can focus in a little more than that.

Q Are there any preliminary briefings with Congress?

MR. NESSEN: There are no briefings on the State of the Union.

Q Have you seen the State of the Union? Have you read the speech?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you tell us if foreign policy still is not discussed in any particular detail in that speech?

MR. NESSEN: No. There is a section on foreign policy. In terms of length, it is not a major item.

Q Is it comparable to last year?

MR. NESSEN: I can't remember how much times was devoted to it last year.

Q One page.

MR. NESSEN: There will be more than one page.

Q On foreign policy?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding, but it has not been scheduled yet.

Q Ron, could I ask you another question about the budget? You say the budget, the appendix and the analysis, will be available at 10:00 tonight. What about the big telephone books, the big ones?

MR. NESSEN: That is what you call the appendix. That is the appendix.

Q No, there is a small one. That is the appendix.

MR. NESSEN: The small book is a special analysis and the telephone book is the appendix.

Q So they will all be here at 10:00?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q And we sign for them as we normally do over there?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q Ron, on the logistics of this thing, was any thought given to the fact that the State of the Union Message and the budget are coming on top of one another and it looks like if you tried to obscure the impact of the State of the Union Message you could not have done better because of the budget coming along and everybody being preoccupied with that?

MR. NESSEN: The timing was set by Congress, as you know.

Q There is no other way you could have done this?

MR. NESSEN: Not when Congress set the dates for the two items, no.

Q Ron, are you taking reservations on numbers of copies or can we have as many as we want?

MR. NESSEN: Alan Wade is on the phone now.

On my briefing tomorrow, I am happy to have one, but what we are going to have to think about, a real budget briefing by the President is going to last, it seems to me, somewhere around an hour or hour and one half, which is 11:00, and then you want to get back here. Do you want to think about a briefing at noon or later, or noon?

Q Why don't you brief us in the afternoon tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Okay. I don't know what the P.M. papers think of that. Wouldn't 12:00 sort of split the difference and make everybody happy?

Q Yes, that would be a good time.

Q Do you expect to have very much? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think that depends on what you have, Jim.

Q I mean you usually know if you are going to have any major announcements, appointments, nominations.

MR. NESSEN: Let me tell you about this next item which may sort of flow into that question.

The President is going to have in tomorrow a number of Governors and mayors at 11:30, and he will talk to them about the budget, the State of the Union, and also some of the more general Administration programs. Those who have accepted the invitation to attend are Governor Otis Bowen of Indiana, Governor Robert Bennett of Kansas -- they are both Republicans, to save you the trouble of looking it up -- and Pat Lucey of Wisconsin, David Pryor of Arkansas and Calvin Rampton of Utah, three Democrats.

Two others have been invited and we have not received their answers yet. They are Governors Thomas Salmon, a Democrat from Vermont, and Governor James Rhodes, Republican from Ohio.

The mayors who have been invited and accepted are Moon Landrieu of New Orleans, who is President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Hans Tanzler of Jacksonville, Florida, who is President of the National League of Cities. In addition, Coleman Young of Detroit, Ralph Perk of Cleveland, Pete Wilson of San Diego, and Tom Moody of Columbus, Ohio.

The choices were to get sort of a broad geographical scope and also it does include officials of the Governors Conference and the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Governor Ray was not invited back tomorrow because, as you know, he is Chairman of the Governors Conference and was here on Saturday, so he is not coming back.

Now my expectation would be to make all or some of the Governors and Mayors available after their meeting with the President. They are going to have lunch with the President and whether there is enough time between the end of the meeting and the beginning of lunch to have them out here and how that would fit together with my briefing, we will have to work out tomorrow.

MORE

#418

Q What time is the meeting, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: 11:30.

Q Will they have to pay their own way?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know.

Q All of those who were invited have accepted except those two?

MR. NESSEN: The two Governors we have not heard from yet. All the mayors who were invited have accepted.

Q But these were hand-picked mayors?

MR. NESSEN: As representatives of the Conference of Mayors and the League of Cities and then kind of a broad geographical selection.

Q Are their views on the budget embargoed until 10:00 a.m. Wednesday, also?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how we could do that. They will probably have to stay away from specific figures and so forth, whatever few figures are left unpublished.

Q Ron, if you brief us in the afternoon, tomorrow, it is not going to give any filing time between the President's briefing and yours.

MR. NESSEN: I know, and that is why I mentioned a later briefing.

Q You can't file anyway.

Q I think we need a briefing tomorrow.

MR. NESSEN: Moving right along, Phil Buchen is going to be meeting this afternoon with Tom Curtis and the Council over at the FEC. This is a meeting that you know was supposed to be held last Friday, and then Tom Curtis had a longstanding commitment, I guess, to go to St. Louis and could not attend, so that meeting will be today at 3:00.

I will talk to Phil afterward and see what sort of report we can pass on after the meeting is over. I don't have any idea of how long it is going to be.

Q Perhaps he could come out and talk to us after that.

MR. NESSEN: Let me talk to him after he gets back.

Q Will the meeting be at the White House or the FEC?

MR. NESSEN: At the FEC.

Q Ron, will he take up the question of whether or not you should be paid by the campaign as well? Curtis has now raised that point.

MR. NESSEN: I saw that. I don't know that that will specifically come up. As John told you last week, when describing the intention of the original meeting, it was to listen to the concerns of Chairman Curtis and to answer whatever questions he had about the Morton appointment.

Now, whether Chairman Curtis wants to raise questions about other White House officials, I don't have any way of knowing.

Q What time is that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: 3:00.

Q What is your reaction to Mr. Curtis' comments, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Basically, I don't have any, Phil.

Q Could I follow Phil's question? Do you still perceive your role as nonpolitical?

MR. NESSEN: Well, again, to go back to what we talked about last week when it came to Rog Morton's appointment, it is difficult to separate -- after all, we have a political system -- so I think basically it is difficult to separate and make any clear-cut line, and clearly you ask me questions that are political and I try to answer them when I can.

Q That is all your fault.

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not. It is just an illustration of how difficult it is to draw that line.

Q Ron, how about Peter Kaye? I have known you to refer questions more than once over to him. Wouldn't that be one answer? Isn't he the political spokesman?

MR. NESSEN: He is certainly the spokesman for the campaign, yes.

Q Do you feel it is your prerogative to come out here and reflect the President's political views?

MR. NESSEN: The President's views, period, yes. That is what I think the job is.

I want to mention that we mentioned a while back that Carroll Kilpatrick was retiring as White House correspondent for the Post, so I guess we ought to drop the other shoe and say, joining you in the White House press corps today is Ed Walsh, who will be covering the White House for the Post. So, we hope you will like it.

We have another person here today, Bill Theis, who many of you have known for a long time, and the President has known for a long time. He is making a farewell call as a member of the Hearst Bureau before taking up his new duties, so we are glad to have Bill at the briefing today.

Here is a little more information on how to get into the State Department. White House and Congressional press credentials will get you into the State Department for the briefing tomorrow. Anybody else who does not have either of those credentials should contact Alan Wade at the OMB. His phone number is 395-4747.

Also, I better tell you at this point that if your organization is going to need more than one copy of the budget, you should also get in touch with Alan Wade and make those arrangements ahead of time so we will be sure to have plenty of budgets. I think most of you probably will need more than one copy.

Q They are following the same procedure they followed for many years of having little cards showing how many you got last time and have gotten back through the years.

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you call Alan at 395-4747.

Q Ron, that is the procedure for anybody else who might want to know. That is it.

Q I have a question. Are you aware of the President ever meeting and discussing with Henry Kissinger Kissinger's version of the wiretapping in the Halperin suit?

MR. NESSEN: This President?

Q Yes, President Ford.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of it.

Q Are you aware that the President may, or has he ever expressed any concern that his Secretary of State has been named in that suit and that the Secretary's sworn testimony on this question is greatly at conflict with the sworn testimony of a considerable number of other people named in the suit?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I am not going to get into a suit that is pending in the courts.

Q I am not asking you to comment so much on the suit as to whether the President is concerned that his Secretary of State has been called into -- the Secretary's word has been called into question in this particular suit.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard the President discuss the matter.

Q Has the President had any discussions with anyone on the subject of the Halperin suit, as long as we are on that issue?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Your response covers this, but I will ask it anyway. Have there been any discussions in the White House at all -- not necessarily involving the President -- staff discussions or Presidential discussions -- as to whether the Government would pay the judgment if the judgment goes against the defendant?

MR. NESSEN: I have never heard that discussed, Jim.

Q Ron, has the President spent any time over the last weekend discussing the Lebanon crisis?

MR. NESSEN: He had some meetings over the weekend with General Scowcroft. I don't know for a fact what specific issues were discussed, but he did meet with General Scowcroft several times over the weekend. He is certainly being kept informed of the situation over there.

Q Has he offered his good offices in any way to try to solve the dispute?

MR. NESSEN: We have publicly restated the American position, but I don't know of any direct American --

Q What is that? I have never heard it.

MR. NESSEN: You have never heard the American position on Lebanon?

Q No.

Q It is under "L."

MR. NESSEN: It might be under "M" for Mideast. I will get it for you and tell you what it is. I don't have the American position.

Q Did he talk to Dr. Kissinger on this matter over the weekend?

MR. NESSEN: He did not have a meeting with Dr. Kissinger over the weekend.

Q Did he talk to him by telephone?

MR. NESSEN: I did not get the telephone log. The meeting log does not show any meetings with Secretary Kissinger, and I do not have the phone log here. Basically, the position of the United States on Lebanon -- I think we have mentioned a couple of times here -- is that we support Lebanon's independence, territorial integrity, and national unity and that we hope the various religious and ethnic groups can solve their problems in a harmonious way and that peace will be restored.

We also think that Lebanon ought to solve its own problems and are opposed to any outside intervention in Lebanon.

The American Ambassador there, Ambassador Godley, is keeping up with the situation, and he has been sending reports.

Let me make clear, this is not the pronouncement of a new policy today. I am restating it.

MORE

Q I have never heard it from this floor.

Q It would appear to be a warning rather directly aimed at Syria.

MR. NESSEN: The fact I was asked about it today and I outlined it to you today does not mean it is new. I have had it in this book for a long time and was prepared to, and I know the State Department has outlined it in these very words a number of times so it is not anything new.

Q You were asked about Syria before, because I believe I or someone asked the question about how does the President feel about Syria's threat to invade Lebanon and at that point you had no comment at all.

MR. NESSEN: It is one thing, Walt, to comment on a reported threat that appeared in a paper somewhere and another thing when Helen asked me what is American policy toward Lebanon, and I just told you.

Q Ron, do you intend for there to be any difference between the statement as you just read it and the statement that Kissinger made at his press conference last week on the same subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is any different. The words may differ, but certainly the policy is the same. And that was not the first time American policy on Lebanon has been stated.

Q Ron, how do you support national unity without getting involved in the international affairs of a country?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see the contradiction. I don't know what you mean.

Q You don't want outside intervention, yet you say we support independence, territorial integrity and national unity.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q It seems to me national unity is an intervention that you said you don't want.

MR. NESSEN: We are stating our view but we are not intervening in any way in Lebanon.

Q Is the President concerned this may flare up into something wider than Lebanon?

MR. NESSEN: He is keeping track of it, Helen. I don't want to make a big thing of this today because there is nothing new about this today.

Q Yes, there is.

MR. NESSEN: You may see it that way, Helen, but you will be very wrong if you take this statement to be anything new. It is the established policy on Lebanon and we can get the date when it was first published, if you would like us to, and I would have given you the exact same answer for any --

Q There is a new situation in Lebanon.

MR. NESSEN: The new situation is you asked me about it today and not yesterday or last week or last month, because I would have used the exact same words and I will get you the date when this became American policy, if you would like me to.

Q I would like to have it.

Q When the Premier of Lebanon resigns and the fighting intensifies, is that not a new situation even slightly?

MR. NESSEN: Helen asked me what is American policy on Lebanon and this is it and has been for a very long time.

Q Then Helen raised the point the situation has changed, which it has, but the policy is still the very same. Is that it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to the registration as a foreign agent of the Government of Iran of the wife of the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?

MR. NESSEN: He has none.

Q He has no reaction to that at all?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Ron, could you comment on reports that while the President was deciding whether to sign or veto the common situs bill, the President Ford Committee received a number of unsigned \$1,000 checks with the implication that if he vetoed the bill, duplicate checks signed would be forthcoming?

MR. NESSEN: I am told there is a rumor. I think what you are reporting is a rumor that a number of unsigned \$1,000 checks were received either here or at the PFC and that apparently the point of the rumor is that if the President would only veto the bill, then the checks would be signed.

I checked this with the White House Correspondence Office and they have received no unsigned checks in any amount.

Q You checked it with who?

MR. NESSEN: The office that receives the White House mail.

Q How about President Ford's mail?

MR. NESSEN: Just to go beyond that for a moment, the policy on checks at the White House for campaign purposes is to return them, whether they are signed or unsigned, and tell the people to make their contributions through the proper channels. The White House does not accept campaign checks of any kind and none were received signed or unsigned in connection with this case.

Q Ron, you are talking about the White House at this point, aren't you?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Let me correct myself here for a minute. There were no unsigned checks received. There have been some checks received here that were signed and did seem to refer in some way to the common situs bill. Some of the people who sent checks were for signing the bill and some were for vetoing the bill. The letters came with checks. In every case the checks were returned because the policy is not to accept campaign contributions at the White House. Now, you really should ask the President Ford Committee about whether they received any checks, but to save you the trouble, they have not received any unsigned checks.

Q Ron, weren't the checks regarded as an attempt to bribe a public official?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, Peter.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen what the letters said.

Q How many of these checks were signed?

MR. NESSEN: Larry is going to check.

Q Were there signed checks at the PFC?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I just did not get into that much detail. I didn't want to do too much political stuff over here.

The language on Lebanon, Helen, just to tidy this up a little bit, as far as I know, as far as public statements by the President goes, he used almost these exact words here when Sadat was here in October, so that is October.

And also in Jacksonville, Florida, in the TV interview down there the President used almost the same words.

Q What date was that?

MR. NESSEN: That was that same period when Sadat was here, November 2. Also prior to the statement in October and then the first two days of November by the President, the State Department used the same language as this prior to October, so the policy is a minimum of three or four months old.

Q Is he planning on having a regular full scale Presidential news conference at any time in the foreseeable future?

MR. NESSEN: There are no specific dates set yet but I do anticipate he will have one.

Q This week?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it will be this week.

Q Ron, is this the first time a President has personally conducted a briefing on the budget?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that Truman did it, and Jim, I think, was here in those days.

Q But Cannon was a hell of a briefer, too.
(Laughter)

Q Ron, has the President asked for any investigation of how bank examiners records were obtained in connection with the City Bank and the other reports of their financial status?

MR. NESSEN: Has the President ordered a report?
No.

Q Ron, I would like to get back to the checks being sent. Does the White House feel it is untoward if they, in returning the checks, give the address of the campaign where you can send these. I just wondered, do they advise where to send it because, after all, the President does live here. I can see the purpose of this but I just wondered, do they forward them on?

MR. NESSEN: No, they send them back.

Q Do they give the address of where the check can be sent?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the exact language. There must be a form letter and it probably says send it to the proper campaign committee.

Q Ron, when they send them back, do they make any notification over at the Federal Election Office?

MR. NESSEN: Larry, do you know what the procedure is in minor detail?

MR. SPEAKES: They send them back to the sender.

MR. NESSEN: Do they tell them where to send them?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

MR. NESSEN: Do we notify the PFC that we have a hot prospect for them, or anything like that?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Ron, do you have a dollar amount on the checks that were received here but returned?

MR. NESSEN: Larry is getting that.

Q Ron, anything on the Secretary of Labor?

MR. NESSEN: Not today.

Q Does the President place any significance on the Iowa Caucus today and his battle with Ronald Reagan? Is he watching the results?

MR. NESSEN: He is probably going to be pretty busy making a speech between 9:00 and 10:00. I have not talked to him about the Iowa Caucus.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:15 P.M. EST)