

This Copy For \_\_\_\_\_

NEWS CONFERENCE

#419

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:05 P.M. EST

JANUARY 20, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: As you know, the President will be meeting in about a half hour with Governors and mayors. Right now other members of the staff are meeting with them. I think I gave you the list yesterday.

At that time, I mentioned that Governor Salmon of Vermont and Governor Rhodes of Ohio had not yet replied to their invitation. They did, and they came, so that is seven Governors.

We put the list out, so you have it. The mayors you know about. There are some staff people here from, for instance, the Governors Conference, and the Conference of Mayors and the League of Cities and the National Association of Counties and the National Conference of State Legislators.

As you know, the purpose of this is to brief the Governors and mayors, as representative of all the Governors and mayors, on the State of the Union and then the budget and then to have lunch with them.

Between 2:00 and 2:30, depending on how lunch runs, we would have some of the Governors and mayors, or all of them, here for you. So, after this briefing we will put on a lunch lid until 2:00 and then bring down, sometime between 2:00 and 2:30 the Governors and mayors to this briefing room.

I think you also know that this afternoon at 5:00 the President will brief bipartisan Congressional leaders on his budget. We will post the list of attendees on that. It is, basically, the leaders of both parties in both the Senate and the House, and those whose committee assignments are such that they are involved in the budget.

Q Will they be able to come in here afterwards?

MR. NESSEN: I would not anticipate that they would, Phil.

Q Why?

MORE

#419

MR. NESSEN: The mail and phone count is relatively light on the State of the Union Message so far, but in anticipation of your questions, I did check at 11 o'clock and found that on the telegrams, first of all, as of 11:00 you have 115 telegrams supporting the State of the Union speech and 35 voicing opposition to it and eight who made other various comments that could not be put into any of those two.

On the phone calls, as of 11:00 a.m., you have 89 phone callers who favored the speech, 25 who voiced various opposition to it, and zero of miscellaneous comment. So, adding those two categories together, you get 204 in favor, 60 opposed and eight comments.

On the caucuses out there in Iowa, basically there is no comment from the White House other than to say the President expects strong support from the Iowa delegation to the National Convention.

I think you know by now about the meeting yesterday between Phil Buchen, the President's counsel; Jim Connor, the Staff Secretary here, and Barry Roth, who is part of Phil Buchen's staff, over at the FEC with the three Commissioners, Commissioners Curtis, Harris and Stabler, and also the Chief Counsel of the FEC, Mr. Murphy, and I think some of you were there and talked to them afterward.

During the meeting, the White House learned of their areas of concern, concerning the Morton appointment, and by learning what they were concerned about we will be able to provide them with the information that they need to assure themselves that the White House will live within the letter and spirit of the law on the Morton appointment.

As we understand the concerns of some of the Commission members, it involves the extent to which Mr. Morton will spend time on electioneering activities. The Commission indicated that it would like to see spelled out what we anticipate Secretary Morton's range of duties will be, and the White House will do this.

The next communication will be a letter from Phil Buchen to the FEC spelling out Mr. Morton's duties.

Q That will be made public, I assume?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it will be a letter to the FEC. I don't know what their procedure for making it public will be.

Q Ron, will that be a breakdown as far as hours that he will be spending?

MR. NESSEN: The letter has not been written yet. It will be in response to their interest in what his range of duties will be, and I don't know whether it will be broken down by the number of hours or what.

Q Ron, this is not just an interest in the FEC, it is of interest to the taxpayers.

MR. NESSEN: John?

Q Will the Commission's concern about the amount of time that Morton spends on electioneering affect the number of hours he spends on electioneering? In other words, will his duties be any different than what they would have been had not the Commission expressed a concern?

MR. NESSEN: You know, it was never anticipated that Rog was going to spend any great amount of time electioneering. As we have said, his duties here are as a Counsellor to the President, with a wide range of areas on which he will advise the President.

His duties also will include the role of liaison with the PFC and the RNC, but in terms of electioneering, it was never conceived that this job would involve very much electioneering and also, as Rog said, and as we have said, in fact as is the case with any member of the Administration, expenses for electioneering -- that is, going out and making speeches and so forth -- expenses are always paid by the PFC and have been.

Q Ron, isn't it true that his first assignment was to go to Iowa and whip up a few delegates?

MR. NESSEN: No, Rog indicated, I think, to you that that was a longstanding commitment in his present role as Commerce Secretary. I don't know the details of that trip out there, anyhow.

Q Could you be more explicit, Ron, as to what the White House understands electioneering to mean?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you, Jim, I think since all this is going to be spelled out for the PFC that I think we ought to just wait and see what the letter says.

Q And then make the letter public?

MR. NESSEN: I will try. I think so, yes.

Q Ron, may I point out to you that this is a matter in which we started these discussions with you on the basis of how the taxpayers would be interested in how the taxpayers' money was spent for the salary of a man partly engaged in politics in the White House?

Let's keep it on that basis, and on that basis I think we have a right to know what the White House decision is as to how his hours will be allocated.

MR. NESSEN: And you will. Of course, as we have said before, the White House does intend to live up to the letter and spirit of the law, and that is one of the purposes of making the additional information available -- to assure the committee of that and, obviously, the President expects all the candidates to follow the same procedure.

MORE

Q Ron, you said something about the Hatch Act a while back. You said that the Hatch Act applies to some in the White House and not to others. Could you explain that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I am not really a lawyer, and --

Q You brought it up. Does it apply to Morton or not?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is it will not.

Q Do you have any idea, roughly, how many it will apply to and how many it won't?

MR. NESSEN: That is really a legal question and I can put you in touch with the Counsel's Office. I don't have the answer.

Q You said the FEC people expressed concern about the amount of electioneering Mr. Morton does --

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I said they expressed concern about the amount of electioneering he would be doing. I said our understanding of the concerns of some Commission members is that it involves the extent to which Morton will spend time electioneering.

Well, you know, words have specific meanings --

Q That is why we asked what you meant by it.

Q Does that mean that the concern is over electioneering and not over the amount of advice given by Mr. Morton, including political advice?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I think, first of all, I am not the proper person to ask about the concerns of the FEC. I was trying to give you some idea of what the meeting was about yesterday, and in that sense I told you what we believe, or understand to be the concerns of some of the members. But for more details about whether they have any further concern, and, if so, what it is, you need to talk to them. I can't do it from here.

Q Ron, can you say whether liaison responsibilities with the President Ford Committee constitute politicking?

MR. NESSEN: You mean electioneering?

Q Or electioneering, if you prefer that phrase.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I would rather wait for the letter from Phil to get drafted and show it to you at that time.

Q Ron, does the President have any reaction to what appeared to come out of that meeting yesterday which was the suggestion that Mr. Morton work 40 hours on official counselling duties and then do his liaison work after hours?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure how that was worded, Phil, and I would like to look at what people said before I comment on it. I know that there was some discussion of 40 hours, but I don't know exactly what people what and --

Q In that connection, Ron, isn't a 40-hour work week for a Government official less than what you would usually expect?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think everybody in the White House certainly works longer than 40 hours and I think it is probably closer to -- probably about 12 hours a day minimum, 6 days a week, so you have, basically, a 72-hour week. But on the little payroll form that you get, it shows that, technically, you are getting paid for 40 hours a week. Well, the check comes out every two weeks so it shows 80 on there, and there is no overtime.

Q 72 hours.

Q Is that a violation of the law?

MR. NESSEN: The child labor law or the Minimum Wage Act? (Laughter)

The Lebanon situation -- I don't have all that much to tell you about that. The President is watching the situation closely. He is being kept informed on a regular basis. He does, as he has said before, have great sympathy for the people of Lebanon. If you will allow me to go ON BACKGROUND for a moment, we do have information that some Palestinian forces have entered Lebanon from Syria. We don't have any way to know accurately how many. Some reports published put the number at 10 to 15,000. We do have enough information to know that that appears to be too high. We also have no evidence that Syrian military forces have entered Lebanon. Now, that is all ON BACKGROUND.

Q Attributed to White House officials, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, that is all right. Let's make it Administration officials.

Other than that, I would just say that the policy that I mentioned to you yesterday remains the policy, that we believe that if that fighting is going to stop, it is going to require moderation and a spirit of compromise so that they can begin a process of political accommodation.

As I said yesterday, our policy has been that we believe the solution should preserve the independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon and its national unity and cohesion.

I think you all may have seen a wire story -- Dr. Kissinger stopped in Copenhagen on his way to Moscow and said the United States had warned all outside parties against intervening in Lebanon. That message was delivered to various parties throughout diplomatic means.

Q Ron, last night in the State of the Union speech the President said that because of intelligence revelations on the Hill that the United States has become blindfolded and hobbled. I wonder if he had the Middle East in mind. Has that been a problem here in Lebanon?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure, Aldo, that he said we have become blindfolded and hobbled. I think he was pointing toward what could happen if this tendency continues to move in the same direction. But I think he is probably not speaking of any one specific area, but more in general.

Q It was not as fresh in his mind as Lebanon --

MR. NESSEN: No, it was not. It did not apply specifically to Lebanon.

Q When the Secretary warns people to stay out and warns others to stay out, what is the "or else?"

MR. NESSEN: This is a wire service word and I don't know precisely what the exact meaning is, but it is an accurate quotation from Dr. Kissinger. There was no "or else" in his remarks, Dick. I think I probably won't go beyond what Dr. Kissinger said.

Q Ron, if there were Palestinian forces intervening in Lebanon from some other countries, would that be considered an outside source?

MR. NESSEN: I think I just would not like to go beyond what I said.

Q Is the President or the Secretary of State, do you know, making any requests through diplomatic channels for withdrawal of those Palestinian forces?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to go beyond what I have said.

Q Ron, who identified them as Palestinians instead of Syrians? How do you tell the difference?

MR. NESSEN: That was ON BACKGROUND and for background clearly it is not going to be possible to identify the source of the information I have given you ON BACKGROUND.

Q Ron, were these considered some Syrian regulars?

MR. NESSEN: We have no evidence of Syrian military forces. ON BACKGROUND we don't have any evidence.

Q They would be using Syrian military hardware, wouldn't they?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to go beyond what I have said.

Q Ron, when you bring the Governors out, are you going to bring them all out or just a representative couple?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to check with them after lunch and see how many can come down.

Q There is no possibility of us getting a break between the time they talk before lunch and the lunch, is there?

MR. NESSEN: No, the schedule calls for them to go straight on over to lunch after their meeting.

Q Is it a working lunch?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is a working lunch. It is called an informal working lunch.

Q Ron, you said you had information as to some Palestinian forces, but then you said in terms of reports of 10 to 15,000 that the information you had that appears to be too high. Can you put the sum in any perspective?

MR. NESSEN: No, because I also said we don't have any way to ascertain accurately what the numbers involved are ON BACKGROUND.

Q Even to the point of saying are we talking about hundreds?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is just not proper from here to go into a very detailed military briefing on the Syrian situation.



Q Can you give us even a rough indication?

MR. NESSEN: We cannot accurately ascertain.

Q Even to the point of saying whether there are hundreds or thousands, for example?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Yesterday you said as a matter of policy the United States opposed any outside intervention. On the background basis of what you have told us, either on the record or on background, do you consider this a serious or dangerous escalation of the situation there, the crisis?

MR. NESSEN: As I said in answer to the same question, Walt, I am not going to go beyond what I have tried to help you with so far.

John.

Q I asked you this question before but I want to see if your answer has changed. The President has expressed concern that the CIA's effectiveness not be undermined and there have been reports of CIA morale overseas going down there because of the assassination, et cetera. Does the President feel he is getting adequate intelligence on the Middle East situation and the Lebanon crisis in particular?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q It was reported in the Post today that the CIA knew the identity of the assassin of Ambassador Davis. Can you confirm that story for us?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that that question -- which really is more properly addressed to the State Department -- would probably bring some information from the State Department if asked over there.

Q Ron, last night the President invoked President Eisenhower's name and spirit in his speech, and when a situation similar to this occurred in Lebanon during the Eisenhower Administration -- (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is really reaching. How about the Barbary pirates which happened during Tom Paine's time. You could have done it that way.

Q He was enunciating a Middle East policy which, as far as I know, is still in existence, which says that if the Government of Lebanon requests intervention by the United States, that that request will be carefully considered.

Now, this may seem like simple history, but I think it is a little more complex than that. There are Christians in Lebanon today who are asking if the United States could not intervene. My question is, is the Eisenhower Doctrine on the Middle East and Lebanon now dead or is there some consideration that, if requested, the United States would intervene?

MR. NESSEN: I have stated the policy yesterday and today toward Lebanon, Bob, and I think you really are somewhat out of my depth, frankly, as a foreign policy expert, and I think you might want to explore that at the State Department.

Q Senator Goldwater said last night he sees no philosophical difference between candidate Reagan and candidate Ford. I am wondering if you would provide some, or what is the White House reaction to Senator Goldwater's rather electrifying observation?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see Senator Goldwater's electrifying observation.

Q Now that you know about it -- it was in the Post this morning -- could you give us some enlightenment? Is there a difference between the philosophies of candidate Reagan and President Ford?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has been asked that any number of times and his answer is that you know his philosophy in detail -- not just his philosophy but how you translate the philosophy into the day-to-day operation of the Government through his proposals and decisions and through this budget that he briefed on this morning. And I am sure that the Ex-Governor Reagan's philosophy will emerge and you can make your own judgment.

Q What is the President's reaction to the Democratic reaction on his State of the Union address?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure there is any unified Democratic response. I noticed on one of the TV shows last night Senator Proxmire, who is certainly a card-carrying Democrat, was asked what he thought of the \$394.2 billion budget and he said he certainly hoped Congress would pass it so I don't know that there is a unified response.

Q Senator Byrd, on the other hand, said it returned to Death Valley Days.

Q Forgive me, I came late, so if you were asked about this I am sorry, but have you been asked for reaction to the Iowa Caucus vote?

MR. NESSEN: I said we would not have any, Walt, other than to say the President expects to have the strong support of the Iowa delegation at the Convention.

Q Could I follow that? Since the returns that are in now indicate he has only a very narrow lead over the challenger on what does he base his expectation for a strong showing in the Iowa delegation at the Convention?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to get into that Iowa situation, which I, personally, don't understand how that works anyhow. But what I do know is that there is quite a way to go before we get to the end of the line and the delegation is picked.

Q Isn't the President disappointed in having only such a narrow lead in a Midwestern State which national polls indicated is his area of strength and in a State where the very popular Governor is a strong supporter of the President?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, what I do know of the Iowa process there are several months to run yet before the delegation is picked, and when it is, the President expects to have its strong support.

Q Ron, on the Lebanon situation, you gave us a little bit of information but then when we started questioning you, you did not want to go any further. Why did you give us anything like you did? What is the purpose?

MORE

MR. NESSEN: The purpose of any briefing here, Phil, is to give out information. I thought I was anticipating questions, and rather than wait for the questions, which I expected, I thought I would give you some information. Is there a problem with giving out information at the briefing?

Q No, I just wondered, is the U.S. concerned that Israel might start moving in this area?

MR. NESSEN: As Secretary Kissinger said, and as I have said, we don't believe there should be any outside intervention and, in fact, the United States has warned all the countries involved not to intervene.

Q Was that warning, Ron, after the background information you gave us about the reports of the Palestinians moving in, or before?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check the timing on it, Jim.

Q Ron, when do you expect the President to name a new Secretary of Labor?

MR. NESSEN: Very shortly, but not today. The next shortest time frame after today.

Q Do you have a time frame on any legislative proposals going to the Hill to follow up the State of the Union?

MR. NESSEN: I don't yet, but I know at one point in the preparation the President said he wanted to get some at least moving before the end of this month, but what they are I don't have yet.

Q Ron, when you talk about the United States as warning all parties against it, I am not quite sure of what parties you are talking about. Are you talking about Arab nations only, or has the United States specifically, through diplomatic channels, warned Israel also not to move?

MR. NESSEN: Dr. Kissinger said all outside parties, and that is all.

Q Is there any reason why that other has to be on background? I wondered what the reason for that was?

MR. NESSEN: I would just rather have it as an Administration spokesman. I think I would like to try out the use of background here more extensively to see if we can't get more information out than we might not be able to if it were attributed.

Q What is the philosophy behind that, that you can get out more information on background? Does that mean you don't have to be responsible for it?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q With regard to Kissinger's warning to all countries involved not to intervene, can you either, background or on the record, tell us the nature of that warning; that is, was there anything more involved than Kissinger saying verbally to some reporters in wherever he is, Denmark, that --

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean was the warning given in some way other than public declaration by the Secretary?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I said earlier it was made through diplomatic channels.

Q Ron, can you tell us anything about the President's activities last night following the President's State of the Union Message? Was there a social gathering in the family quarters?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of. I know he went directly back. He and Mrs. Ford watched a television playback of the speech. But, as far as I know, there was nobody with him except maybe members of the family.

Q Mr. Usery was not up in the family quarters last night?

MR. NESSEN: I did not see him go up.

Q Mr. Cheney indicated on television this morning that over the weekend the President had really lost his temper over something. There is another report that he lost his temper and took the speech, the State of the Union speech, away from Bob Hartmann.

I wonder if you can give us any indication on what all the flare-up was?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that Dick said the President lost his temper. I forget what words Dick used, but they were quite a bit short of that. I can tell you certainly that the President at no time took the preparation of the speech away from Bob Hartmann.

Q Ron, may I ask again, just to be sure of what we are talking about, did the Secretary say in this Lebanon business that he warned "all outside parties"?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q How do you define "parties" in that context?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to, but he warned all outside parties.

Q Can we assume that it means nations or can we assume it means more than nations?

MR. NESSEN: I would just stick with the Secretary's words.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EST)