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#429

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:25 P.M. EST

FEBRUARY 3, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: Just looking through the schedule today, Rog Morton is being sworn in today.

Q Is there coverage of that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No, there isn't. It is a private ceremony.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because it is.

Q At whose request?

MR. NESSEN: It was just a decision to have it as a private ceremony.

Q Has any of his salary been sent back to the Treasury yet?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Former Congressman Chuck Chamberlain is going to drop in for a few minutes this afternoon to talk to the President. He is a former Republican Member of the House from Michigan. He wanted to come in. He is currently practicing law in Washington and wanted to come in and express his support for the President and offer his help.

Q Will the President ask him to take any role in the campaign?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Federal appointment?

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MR. NESSEN: No. It is just a visit from a friend.

Q Ron, the private swearing-in, is that covered possibly by audio tape or for Archive purposes?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Will the President make a statement?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is just a private thing for Rog and his family.

Q He is Cabinet level?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is this the first time in the Ford Administration when a Cabinet member has been sworn in privately?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Who else?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I have not done any research.

Q Who is swearing him in, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Let's find out who is administering the oath. I assume John Ratchford.

Q Who is John Ratchford?

MR. NESSEN: He is a notary here in the building.

Q Notary?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He is Executive Clerk, isn't he?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

The President will meet with Michael Moskow, who is, as you know, the head of the Council on Wage and Price Stability, and he will review briefly for the President recent activities of the Council and outline its future plans.

At 3:00 the President is having a meeting on the situation he is quite concerned with, and it has to do with renewal of the general revenue sharing legislation, which you know he strongly supports, as do the Governors. Congress has dragged its feet on this, and there is a real danger that general revenue sharing will expire and that the States will lose that money, which is a little over \$6 billion a year.

So, the President is going to have a meeting this afternoon to discuss the situation and see what can be done to persuade Congress to move on with this and assure the States of this money.

The participants will include the Vice President and Secretary Simon, a number of people from the White House staff, including Jack Marsh, Jim Cannon, Max Friedersdorf, Jim Lynn, Ed Schmults of the Legal Counsel's Office, some members of the Domestic Council, some members of the Vice President's staff, and some staff people from the Treasury Department.

If you would like to take pictures at the beginning of that, I don't see any problem with that, and we can bring out somebody afterward, probably the Vice President.

Q We will trade you that one for Rog Morton.
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: We will probably bring the Vice President down after the revenue sharing meeting, if you would like to talk to him.

Q How soon does this have to be passed by Congress?

MR. NESSEN: The expiration date is December 31 of this year.

Q Only 11 months to go.

MR. NESSEN: The problem with the 11 months to go, if I may mention it, is that the States are in the process of preparing their budgets for fiscal years and calendar years that run into 1977, and they have absolutely no assurance that they are going to get the \$6 billion.

So, it is not a question of passing this extension next December 30 and having it make any sense or be of any help to the States. It is something that they need to either plan to continue to get or to realize that Congress has cut them off. That is why there is an urgency to have it done soon.

Q Aren't the House hearings about to start, Ron? The House Government Operations hearings?

MR. NESSEN: The first week of February, that is correct. I am sorry. That has been postponed until mid-February and no specific date has been set for it. That is the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Revenue Sharing, headed by L. H. Fountain.

Q About what time will this be?

MR. NESSEN: The meeting begins at 3:00, and I should say you ought to stand by around 3:45 to 4:00.

On the Rog Morton swearing-in, Bob Linder is Chief Clerk of the White House, and he frequently does swearing-ins.

Q Is it possible you could tell us whose decision this was? Was this your decision to keep it private, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I have any further announcements.

Q Have you any further remarks on the private agreement between Sadat and the United States on the PLO?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen that story.

Q It was on CBS Radio this morning, and Sadat was castigating Syria for the events in Lebanon, and in that same speech Sadat said he and the United States had a private agreement, the details of which he would not disclose, on what future dealings with the PLO should be.

MR. NESSEN: I will have to look into that one, Walt. I have not heard of it.

Q Would you, please? It was on CBS Radio this morning.

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Can you tell us the White House decision to cancel the White House fellows program for this year?

MR. NESSEN: It is not the White House fellows program, Carl, it is the summer intern program. This is an election year, and while most White House people are exempt from the Hatch Act, the interns are not exempt from the Hatch Act, and since some of the people they might be working for might devote some of their time to politics, which would involve the interns in politics in the broadest sense, it was felt that to avoid any conflict or potential conflict probably it would be discontinued for this summer of an election year.

Q How many are there, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have all the details on the intern program. I can give you the names, roughly --

Q Roughly?

MR. NESSEN: -- of a couple of dozen.

Q Has that ever been done in the past?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know one way or the other, Fran.

Q I would like to ask you something in the framework of football. It is not for me to tell you that the President is deeply involved in football, and recently a two-time All-American died, Paul Robeson, and I am wondering whether the President sent any letter of condolence to the family or any display or anything?

MR. NESSEN: I will check. I don't know.

Q Do you have a successor for Moynihan yet?

MR. NESSEN: No, we don't have a successor to Moynihan yet.

Q Has the President chosen someone?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, Jim.

Q You are aware Moynihan said they did have someone in mind?

MR. NESSEN: He said he thought that he had someone in mind, yes.

Q Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: If he does, he hasn't mentioned it to me.

Q What is the exact role of Pearl Baily at the United Nations?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to get you her exact title. My understanding is over the years there have been outstanding citizens given advisory posts with the U.N. delegation, and that is the role that she now plays.

Q There was some rumblings from New York that she was acting as Ambassador. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: That is not true.

Q Because she is pro-Arab and Moynihan is pro-Israel, there must be some conflict.

MR. NESSEN: That is your characterization.

Q That is not mine.

MR. NESSEN: She is not acting Ambassador or under consideration to be Ambassador.

Q Can you announce a press conference this weekend of the President?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't see one this weekend.

Q Ron, can you tell us today the President's position on abortion?

MR. NESSEN: I have talked to him about it.

Q Has he talked to anybody else about it?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I seemed to have lost my notes on it.

Q Oh, no, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: As I understand his position, number one, he has taken an oath of office which requires him to uphold the laws as interpreted by the courts, and he will.

He does not believe in abortion on demand. He does not personally agree with -- I think would probably be the better way to say it -- the Supreme Court decision on this matter.

At the same time, he does not support a Constitutional amendment to prohibit abortion. He doesn't think that that is the proper remedy in this area.

He does think that there are instances where abortion should be permitted, and specifically he is thinking of the victims of rape or cases where the mother is ill.

Q Is that the extent of the cases?

MR. NESSEN: Those are the two I have heard him mention most often.

Q Did he mention incest, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think that would be included, Les.

He really feels that if there is to be any further action in this area, it ought to be the individual States which decide for themselves what should be the situation governing abortion within their own State, each individual State should decide.

If there is to be any action or legislation, it ought to be in the area of giving the States this authority.

Q Have you finished with that?

MR. NESSEN: I think that covers his views.

Q He would support a Constitutional amendment then that would not knock down the Supreme Court decision entirely but would refer the matter back to the States? It wouldn't bar abortion but the amendment would knock down the situation insofar as allowing the States to decide?

Q Don't the States already have the right to decide?

MR. NESSEN: If there were to be a Constitutional amendment -- and as I understand it, because I am not a lawyer -- my understanding is in order to give the States, each State, the authority to determine its own abortion regulations, that would require a Constitutional amendment and he would support such an amendment.

Q He would. Does he?

MR. NESSEN: There is no such amendment that I know of.

Q Yes, there are such amendments that have been introduced.

MR. NESSEN: In his role as President, he doesn't have a role in the Constitutional amendment process but, as a matter of personal view, if there is to be anything done, that is what he would personally favor.

Q Ron, what about the amendment he introduced several years ago when he was still a Congressman? His feelings haven't changed?

MR. NESSEN: Was that amendment leaving it to the States?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: He doesn't feel he plays any part in it, but that is the approach he favors.

Q How does the President feel about abortion in a case where there is medical evidence the child would be deformed, perhaps in the event of a Tay-Sachs pregnancy?

MR. NESSEN: Adam, I didn't get into with him each and every possible reason for an abortion being considered. He did cite three instances which in his view might justify an abortion, or two. I think I can speak for him and say that the one Les raised would be another. I didn't go and say, "What about this and what about that?"

Q Did he say this to Mr. Cronkite in the interview?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q What does he think about abortion as an issue in a Presidential campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand the question. Does he think it will be one?

Q Does he think it should be one?

Q It is clearly one. Does he think it is appropriate in a Presidential campaign, and I guess the secondary part of the question is, does he think abortion is getting too much attention, too little attention or about the right amount of attention?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know one way or the other. I don't know how you answer the question. The President, I don't think, needs to approve or disapprove of issues or nonissues in the campaign. This is his view that I have been requested a number of times to give. Beyond that, I don't see what I can say, Tom, along those lines.

Q You said if there is action taken the President would favor the amendment that you discussed.

MR. NESSEN: In the sense that, personally, that is the direction, but he has no role to play.

Q I understand, but does he think there should be action? You say if there is action. Would he prefer that there not be action, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Again, I don't think that is his decision to make. As President, he will uphold the law. He has some personal feelings about it which I have given you.

Q Would he lobby for Congress to pass that amendment or would he just stay out of it?

MR. NESSEN: As President, he stays out of it.

Q Ron, if he does have a reasonably well-defined view on circumstances when abortion should be permitted, why does he want the States to set those regulations rather than the Government?

MR. NESSEN: He believes it is a matter that can best be handled by the representatives of the people in each State who are familiar with the views and standards of their own people.

Q Ron, isn't that just about what we have now? In other words, does he favor no change in the situation?

MR. NESSEN: I told you he personally does not agree with the Supreme Court decision, although he will uphold it.

Q Ron, has the President, in talking about this with you, considered one of the arguments against the so-called local option amendment, which is that this benefits the wealthy, enables people of upper- or middle-income levels to go to States where abortions are more liberal but deprives the poor in States which have more restrictive laws an equal chance?

MR. NESSEN: I feel sure that in considering his position he is aware of all the arguments on both sides.

Q You referred to a mother's illness, Ron. Does he mean physical or mental or both?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't get into that much detail with him, Les.

Q Ron, under the Supreme Court ruling, as I recall it, States still have the right to set their own laws as long as they are not more restrictive than the quite precise restrictions in the Supreme Court ruling. So, that means States do have really the rights right now to set their own laws. In upping that States have more rights --

MR. NESSEN: Let me stop you there. He is not urging anything, because he has no role in the process now. He is simply stating his personal views.

Q All right, he would like to see if there is going to be any action at all, that the States get the right to make their own rules on abortion.

MR. NESSEN: I want to make sure you understand, when you sit down and write, you don't say the President today urged a Constitutional amendment. It is his personal view, if there is any action, this is the one he favors.

Q If there is any action, the one he favors, it seems to me, would be giving the States the right to make more restrictive rulings than the Supreme Court. That is basically what you are saying because they already have the right to make rulings no more restrictive than the Supreme Court.

So, he is saying the States should be able to restrict it more than the Supreme Court says, right?

MR. NESSEN: Would you repeat the question? I don't think I can go into that great legal labyrinth because I don't understand what you said.

Q You are saying the States should have rights they don't have now. He is saying if anything is going to be done, the States should have a right they don't have now. The only right they don't have now is to pass laws that differ substantially from the Supreme Court decision.

Therefore, he is saying -- correct -- that the States, if any change is made, they should have the right to restrict abortions more than the Supreme Court said?

MR. NESSEN: I will check with him because it is a matter of some delicacy, and I want to be certain I know his thoughts on it.

Q Do he and Mrs. Ford have diverging views on this subject?

MR. NESSEN: I will let you make that judgment, Fran.

Q Since the President, you said, does not agree with the Supreme Court decision, isn't it fair to say he would like to see the action he prefers taken, even though he has no role in the decision?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't think you should take this beyond what I have told you because I think it is clear to you it was carefully thought out and carefully worded, and so it precisely reflects his views.

Q He has a court decision he doesn't agree with, and he doesn't want anything done about it?

MR. NESSEN: Personally, he does not have a role at this stage.

Q Isn't it more precise to say he chooses not to have a role?

MR. NESSEN: There is no role.

Q Could not the President propose, just as he proposes legislation, could he not propose a Constitutional amendment?

MR. NESSEN: Presidents do not, I understand, propose Constitutional amendments. They originate with Congress, which is in the Constitution, I think.

Q There is no Presidential leadership need here?

MR. NESSEN: I think we are going into the area of "what if" and I think I have given you his view, which I have been asked for over the days.

Q In the interest of precision, are we going to get the President's exact words on this matter or do we have to depend on your interpretation of the President's words?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to depend on my interpretation, Carl, which I carefully checked with him to make sure it was accurate.

Q When will we get his exact words as given to Mr. Cronkite in the interview?

MR. NESSEN: I suppose at 7:00, or whenever the program is on.

Q Instead of a release at the same time, couldn't we get an exact quote of what he said to Cronkite?

MR. NESSEN: There were no plans to release a transcript.

Q When was the interview with Cronkite?

MR. NESSEN: This morning.

Q This one subject only, I am talking about.

MR. NESSEN: There is no plan to put out a transcript.

Q Ron, we really need it. This is very confusing. There are a lot of women who think that this is going to be a very big issue in the campaign.

Q Why isn't there going to be a transcript with Cronkite? There has been with New Hampshire editors and almost everybody else that has been in there.

MR. NESSEN: I think probably from now on we won't, Tom.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: Because these private interviews ought to -- you know, the news conferences and big general things we will put out transcripts, but not for the private interviews.

Q There is no privacy for the President of the United States.

Q This is a matter, Ron, that is of general interest, and I don't think it should be confined to a private interview.

MR. NESSEN: I think everybody in this room -- probably half the people in this room -- have had private interviews with the President, and the other half will soon.

Q I don't think any of us have gotten the President's statement on a major issue such as this in an interview.

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't planned that way.

Q We asked two and a half weeks ago and we have repeatedly asked why is it this whole room full of people, who are obviously concerned about this, who asked you about this for almost three weeks, and then Cronkite comes in and gets an exclusive on it. Why is that?

Q Because he is Cronkite.

MR. NESSEN: Thank you, Walt.

Q Ron, you also said the President was preparing his views to be made public.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I said that. I said he was reviewing the issue, making sure he had it worded precisely so it reflected his views and so forth.

Q Couldn't we have it worded precisely?

MR. NESSEN: I have given you his views, which I consider to be very precise.

Q How do we know but what Cronkite went in there and talked about something very private, a very special interest? I don't say he did, but he certainly had the benefit of a friendship with the President, especially since he has been doing it in the past.

MR. NESSEN: Let's move on.

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Q Let's move back to the transcript thing. I don't think we should leave it where it is.

You mean, from now on when there is a private interview given by the President, there will be no transcript; each individual or news group or whatever will be able to go in there and come away with it and we won't be able to see what the exchanges were between them?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Did you make that decision unilaterally, or did you make it on your own, or after conferences with the President, or did you talk with representatives of this group about it?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably our method of operation, Tom, is something we should not deal with.

Q Why not? We all have a stake in it.

Q You told us before the Cronkite interview that the President was making up his mind on the issue of abortion.

MR. NESSEN: No, I didn't. I am sorry, Howard, I said he was reviewing his views and wanted them to be worded precisely and so forth, which is what he has done over the past few days.

Q We would like his words precisely, too.

MR. NESSEN: I have given you I think quite precisely his views on abortion.

Q It seems to me -- and I may be the only one that feels that -- but it seems to me your method of operation here is very much within the province of our interest in this room and a subject that is appropriate for a news briefing, because it has to do with the flow of information, Ron, and I would like to know whether you made this decision unilaterally or made it in conjunction with the President, or whether you consulted with anyone, say, from the White House Correspondents Association?

MR. NESSEN: No, I did not make the decision alone, Tom, and I understand CBS is putting out transcripts.

Q But that doesn't satisfy what would be a continuing problem, it seems to me -- transcripts of interviews with the President for release at the time that they are so set?

MR. NESSEN: We have not put out transcripts of all the private interviews.

Q You say CBS is putting out a transcript. Is that of every word of the interview or only the portion of the interview that plays on the air?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Tom. You will have to check with them.

Q That is what we are trying to get at here. We can all listen on the air and see what he says on the air.

Q CBS isn't going to give all of us a transcript.

MR. NESSEN: I understand they will.

Q As soon as we finish this briefing, can we have from the reporter a transcript of all you have said here today on abortion?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly. It is put out every day.

Q Not wait for the whole transcript but have that page alone right quick because it is very confusing.

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree it is confusing but if it will help, we will get the --

Q It is. You yourself said, "I will have to go back and ask. I am not sure about that." And in your own terms that is not clear.

MR. NESSEN: On one matter that is true, but we will have that page or pages of the transcript available first if you would like.

Q Is it correct the President's views are the same as those reiterated by the Press Secretary terHorst early in this Administration?

MR. NESSEN: I have not read back over Jerry's briefing. These are the President's views on abortion.

Q Ron, since the President personally believes this is an issue that ought to be handled by the States rather than the national Government, is it also true, then, that personally, although he has no role in the process, he believes it should not be an issue in a national campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I told Tom I have no way to answer that question. I don't think the President --

Q He is not going to try to make it an issue?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Was a stenographer in there when Cronkite was there today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Taking a transcript?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Aren't we entitled to that under Freedom of Information?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Tom. I will have to check with the lawyers.

Q It is my guess that we are. It would have to be available here somewhere and I would suspect that it would be.

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check with the lawyers on that.

Q Ron, what has been your rationale up to now for putting out transcripts?

MR. NESSEN: We have not. We have kept a bonded copy for the files.

Q I think the New Hampshire editors the week before last put that out in the Post.

Q Can you think of one you haven't put out a transcript on?

MR. NESSEN: I can think of a lot we haven't put out a transcript on.

Q Excuse me, Ron --

MR. NESSEN: I think Bob will get us back on the track in a moment.

Q The difference is today you are announcing a change in policy.

MR. NESSEN: No, we aren't.

Q You say we won't put out a transcript of private interviews any more. The fact is, you have in many or most instances in the past and I don't think you have answered the question as to why you have decided to make this change.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I just think that the people -- and as I say, half the people here have had interviews and the other half will. They are interviews with one newspaper, one television station or radio station. It is their interview and what they get out of it they will print or broadcast and then we will go on to the next one.

Q We have been waiting for days, Ron, for his views on abortion.

MR. NESSEN: I have just given them to you, Howard.

Q Do you think the public interest is served by having many papers having to report to the country an imprecise paraphrase by the Press Secretary in place of the President's actual words?

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree with you that it is imprecise or that it is a paraphrase, Carl. These are the President's views and everything I say here reflects the President's views and this very accurately reflects the President's views.

Q Then everything you say can be quoted to the President?

MR. NESSEN: Look, let's not get into the philosophy of the Press Secretary. You know everything I say here represents the President's views and it is used that way every day and this can be, too.

Q It is not the President's words.

Q It is not clear why you will not give us the President's actual words which are easily available and which are the best statement of his position.

MR. NESSEN: Get us back on the track, Bob.
(Laughter)

Q Did Cronkite go into the possibility of Tay-Sachs or thalidomide?

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not.

Q What are you trying to hide by not releasing the transcript?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, what I have been asked for, over however many days it is, is the President's views on abortion, which I have given you, the President's views on abortion, with great accuracy and precision.

Q Going to the policy change, though, Ron, that Brokaw is hitting at, it was a CBS interview, it was fully transcribed and was released, and this is the first time this type of interview has been given and you have had a policy change insofar as the flow of information is concerned, and it raises the question of what are you attempting to hide by changing your policy?

MR. NESSEN: Nothing.

Q Let me ask you this: Was this part of the condition of the interview?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Was there discussion of it with Cronkite before you began the interview?

MR. NESSEN: No, nor with anybody else in CBS. I doubt CBS knows anything about the transcript policy of the White House.

Q Did the President say anything about a policy that you would rather not have it out and Cronkite agreed to it?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Does the President know his precise words are being withheld from the press? (Laughter)

Q Ron, when you say you are precise, does the rape he is talking about -- does that mean statutory or forceable?

MR. NESSEN: John.

Q Are you saying you don't know, Ron? This is very important. It has been debated in many State legislatures. You say it is a precise statement of how the President feels.

Now, does he favor statutory rape? (Laughter)

This is important, Ron, because there are laws in almost every State. Does he or doesn't he, if you know the precise statement? We are trying to learn, Ron. Can you tell us? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: John.

Q Paul asked, was the public interest being served in this particular case. My question goes to the broader question about these transcripts.

Do you feel the public interest is being served by restricting the flow of information? That is really what you are doing. Not all newspapers and all magazines will carry verbatims as, say, the New York Times does and other periodicals -- they carry word-for-word the interview. Not everyone is going to do that. That means some information will not reach the public. Therefore, you made a conscious decision to do this. It does not appear to us to be in the public's interest. Can you tell us how it is in the public's interest or did you take that into consideration?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, we did.

Q Can you explain it?

MR. NESSEN: John, I don't know why we are having all of this today. You know the President has had 55 or so private interviews. We have not put out 55 transcripts. We have at some times and not at other times, and from now on we won't.

Q Have any of those private talks with reporters where you didn't put out a transcript -- have any inaccuracies showed up?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Since it is an open White House, why don't you go the other way?

MR. NESSEN: Come on, Tom.

Q It is not a matter of frivolity to me and shouldn't be dismissed by you as lightly as it is. It seems to me this is a very important policy decision you have made unilaterally without conversation with anyone representing this side of it.

MR. NESSEN: Taking it seriously, as I do, I don't think you know who discussed what in the White House and how decisions are made. I told you quite firmly it was not a decision I made alone and it wasn't, but it is a decision.

Q Was it a decision that was forced on you or did you --

Q Is this paid for from campaign financing money?

MR. NESSEN: No, Fran. The transcripts are not paid for with campaign money.

Q Was this a forced or statutory decision?
(Laughter)

Q They are paid for with Government money or taxpayers' money?

MR. NESSEN: They are.

Q Are you saying this was the President's decision?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Whose decision was it?

MR. NESSEN: It was a White House decision.

Q You said we didn't know how the decision was reached. Could you enlighten us?

MR. NESSEN: What decision?

Q Not to release the transcript.

MR. NESSEN: No, it was a White House decision, Jim.

Q Reached by whom?

MR. NESSEN: By various people in the White House.

Q But the President is not aware of it?

MR. NESSEN: Come on, guys.

Q Is he aware of it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether he is aware of it and what difference would it make if he were?

Q It makes a lot of difference as to whether we are continuing to have an open Presidency.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think the open Presidency hangs on the distribution of transcripts. (Laughter)

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Q It hangs on a lot of things.

MR. NESSEN: It certainly does.

Q Can you confirm the Cronkite interview did get into the subject of abortion?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, do you favor this new policy? Did you advise for it or against it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will tell what my advice was.

Q Go ahead and tell us. Were you overruled by some counsel back there or something?

MR. NESSEN: Lee?

Q Has the President asked Mr. Buchen or anyone else in the White House to look into possible questionable practices by the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service?

MR. NESSEN: No. My understanding is that Mr. Alexander works for Bill Simon and that Bill Simon is keeping himself aware of how Mr. Alexander is performing his job.

Q Ron, in the interview last Friday with the radio and television editors, the subject of busing came up. I don't recall the President answering this, but maybe you can enlighten us. Does he favor or does he not favor a Constitutional amendment prohibiting cross-district busing?

MR. NESSEN: John, I don't know. I will have to check on that.

Q Ron, if a person turns on their television set to a different station and doesn't happen to hear Mr. Cronkite, how are they going to know the President's views if it isn't given out by the other TV stations correctly and by the press, the writing press correctly?

MR. NESSEN: I just gave them to you, Naomi.

Q You gave them to me, but I am talking about J. Q. Public, who would be looking at a different program instead of Cronkite at that time?

MR. NESSEN: J. Q. reads all your papers, I think, and will see his views reported.

Q But they won't have an exact transcript.

Q Ron, with all due respect, I think the country deserves the President's words on this and not yours. Why is it so difficult to pick out that part of the transcript and just give us the President's words on abortion?

MR. NESSEN: I will get a Xerox made of this.

Q Are those the President's words or yours?

MR. NESSEN: This is an unofficial transcript taken down hurriedly by a typist. It is not proofread or anything else, and there is a fair number of typos in there.

Q I don't want to cut off anybody, but I was wondering, can you give us any more details on the Moynihan thing? When the President learned of it, did he ever make an attempt over the weekend to ask Moynihan to stay on again?

MR. NESSEN: No, Bob, I think just to give you a little bit of a scenario, Pat was in here last week, as you know, and at that time did not say anything about leaving. On Saturday a courier brought the letter from Pat, which you saw yesterday, dated Saturday. Dick Cheney was called during the trip and --

Q They brought it here to the White House and the President was out at Dearborn?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, so the contents in the letter were phoned to Cheney and Cheney notified the President during the flight from Dearborn to Williamsburg and, from the wording of the letter, it was clear that Pat had made up his mind and so there was no effort made to dissuade him.

Q Were we not told that the first time the President saw the letter -- and technically that might be right -- was not until yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is right.

Q But he did know the contents on Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Were we not misled, some of us, by being told that he did not see the letter until yesterday and not being told that he knew of the contents?

MR. NESSEN: I think I told most people who asked yesterday, or all the people who asked yesterday, that the President was notified on Saturday that Pat was resigning.

Q Ron, what was the reason, though, for waiting until yesterday to announce it?

MR. NESSEN: In order to draft a letter of acceptance.

Q Ron, can you tell us what the President's reaction was when he was informed by Cheney?

MR. NESSEN: He asked why and Cheney explained to him the tenure problem at Harvard.

Q Ron, just one last question, from me at any rate, on the Cronkite thing. That was done -- and I am sure you knew and the President did -- as one in a series of political interviews of the candidates and their views on issues.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Did the President view this as a political appearance by him?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that the issue has ever come up. He was aware that it was one in a series in which candidates were asked their views on issues. He was also told that, since his views were already known on the issues, that he would be asked additional questions that the other candidates weren't, asking for why he had reached certain decisions and what his reaction to certain criticism of his stands were and so forth, so his interview was planned by CBS to go beyond what the other candidates had done.

Q Ron, are we to presume the President answered Mr. Cronkite's inquiries on this subject but has refused to answer yours on our behalf? I am a little worried here.

MR. NESSEN: Jim?

Q On the Moynihan matter, if my recollection of his letter is correct, there was a reference in the letter to a division of his heart, or some phrase to that effect. He was clearly torn as to whether to give up his tenure and remain in Government or to go back to Harvard.

If that was in the letter, why did the President not feel it was appropriate to try to dissuade him?

MR. NESSEN: In the conversation with Dick, who had talked to Pat on the phone, the message was relayed to the President that Pat had made up his mind to go back to Harvard.

Q Did Dick call him in New York after he got word of the letter?

MR. NESSEN: I understand Dick talked to Pat on Saturday.

Q Ron, does the President feel that Moynihan was something less than candid with him for not telling him last week, when he was in here, about what he was planning?

MR. NESSEN: No, because I don't know when Pat made up his mind. You will have to ask Pat when he made up his mind.

Q The question of tenure is a longstanding thing. It isn't something that just came along.

MR. NESSEN: As I said yesterday, Pat was in negotiations with Harvard for quite some time to see if he could get an extension of the deadline to see if he could maintain his tenure. How those discussions went and when he found out he had to make up his mind, I don't know. You will have to ask Pat that.

Q Ron, is Mrs. Black being considered as a replacement for Moynihan?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I want to get into who is and who isn't.

Q Ron, would Cheney call Ambassador Moynihan after getting that letter without talking to the President? Did he talk to the President and then call Moynihan?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the timing of the call. I know there was a call.

Q Was he trying to talk him out of resigning?

MR. NESSEN: No, he was not.

Q Does the President want someone who is as outspoken as Moynihan was?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you many times, Phil, Pat was doing precisely what the President wanted him to do, and I would expect his replacement would follow the same policy, and whatever personal differences of style there may be in the new Ambassador, he certainly will follow the same approach.

Q Ron, has the President decided whether to appear on any one of the candidate's forums that the League of Women Voters is going to sponsor?

MR. NESSEN: The proposal is in here and it is being considered and there has not been a decision yet.

Q Has the President asked for the resignation of Civil Service Commission Chairman Bob Hampton?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of it if he has.

Q Will you check?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What was the purpose of the Cheney call to Moynihan?

MR. NESSEN: Just to talk to Pat and see what his plans were and to explore further the points he made in his letter and so forth.

Q But it was not a call to try to persuade him to stay on the job?

MR. NESSEN: It is not my understanding that it was.

Q Have you got an answer to yesterday's question about how the President feels about Metro grant funds?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I surprised you, didn't I?

MORE

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: He does want to see the Metro completed and you see that in his budget proposal, the one of last week. He proposed a 16 percent increase in mass transit funds over the current fiscal year and part of that money comes from the accelerated use of interstate highway funds for mass transit projects, including principally the use of highway funds for Metro.

You have to look into the budget to get more details, but it is specifically targeted so that segments of Metro will be opening on time or even earlier than originally planned.

Secondly, as far as the Administration position goes, Secretary Coleman, I think some of you know, has been working with D. C., Maryland and Virginia officials on the issue and Secretary Coleman has said that he thinks there is sufficient money in the budget and interstate highway money to take care of the Metro situation, and the President feels that Secretary Coleman is on top of the issue and is handling it in the right manner.

Q Does he agree with the tactics by the Virginia Governor, Mr. Godwin, of holding Metro money hostage for construction of I-66?

MR. NESSEN: I am not that familiar with the Metro I-66 matter.

Q Along the same line, has the President spoken to Secretary Coleman about the Concord decision?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, they are going to be voting in the House in mid-afternoon on natural gas deregulation. Since the President has been so interested in this particular matter, I am wondering, are you going to have a reaction here after the vote?

MR. NESSEN: Today's vote, of course, is a procedural vote. The vote is on a rule to take up, I guess, the Krueger amendment, if I am not mistaken. I mean, I can tell you ahead of time that the President would be certainly pleased for the House to vote to take up the Krueger amendment.

I don't know if all of you were here for Frank Zarb's and Congressman Brown's briefing last night but it is quite detailed as to why the Administration and the President feel that a bill to increase the supply of natural gas is needed and the Senate has already passed it, of course, and he is hopeful the House will take the first step today in the procedural vote and then go on to pass a bill that would increase the supply of natural gas.

Q Could I go back to Metro a minute? When you say the President wants to see Metro completed, by that do you mean he wants to see it completed in its original concept of all the artery legs going out to Dulles, Virginia and the Maryland suburbs? Is that what you mean?

MR. NESSEN: Let me put you in touch with our Metro expert, all right?

Q May I ask who that is?

MR. NESSEN: Margaret, who should people call on Metro? Or you, can you do it?

MISS EARL: I will talk to you later on it.

Q How about answering that one question now?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check.

Q Ron, you said the President had not talked with Coleman about the Concord decision. Is the President aware of Coleman's decision on Concord?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is not.

Q Will he be informed before Coleman makes it public?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, shortly before.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:15 P.M. EST)