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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. EST

FEBRUARY 11, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The Art Fletcher meeting that was supposed to be held yesterday did not get held yesterday because of a jam-up on the President's schedule, so it is being held at 11:15 today.

Then the President will be meeting with his Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. That will be in the Cabinet Room at 12:15. The Council asked for this meeting so they could talk to the President about the Council and its work and hear his ideas on the work, and the plan is to have a pool go in to cover that.

The President is meeting at 1:45 with the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of Zaire, Mr. Nguza. He is bringing with him personal letters to the President from President Mobutu and President Senghor of Senegal. The Senegalese Ambassador in Washington, Andre Coulbary, also is attending, and Secretary Kissinger is attending.

If you are interested in a photo at the beginning of the meeting, we can do that.

Q Do you have the words as to what the letters are about?

MR. NESSEN: I would say the letters and the meeting will deal with African affairs, and I would think you wouldn't be wrong to think that the Angola situation is probably the principal matter.

Q Will there be any readouts?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a report after the meeting.

Q From the Press Office?

MR. NESSEN: From the Press Office.

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Q Do you know whether these letters are requesting something of the United States?

MR. NESSEN: I can't spell out the contents of the letters until they are delivered, Helen.

Q Will you spell out the contents, then?

MR. NESSEN: We will give you a report on the meeting. You know we never publish letters between heads of State.

Q You don't have to publish them, just tell us what's in them.

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow the President will be going to the Lincoln Memorial to attend the annual wreath-laying ceremonies on the occasion of Abraham Lincoln's Birthday. The President will leave the White House at about 12:20. A travel pool will accompany him. I think if we get the briefing started promptly at 11:30, we should be able to finish in time for that.

The President will lay a wreath at the Memorial and also have some brief remarks. This is an annual ceremony. Presidents have attended it off and on over the years, going back to 1922. There will be open press coverage of that.

To set up your cameras ahead of time, if you are interested, you should be there no later than 11 o'clock. The accreditation needed is either White House pass, Senate or House Gallery pass, or Metropolitan Police pass.

The President will be back here at about 12:45. The National Park Service Public Affairs Office can give you more details of the ceremony, Mr. George Berklacy, whose phone number is 426-6700.

Q Will the remarks be piped in?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they will.

Some more detail of the Florida trip.

First of all, press plans are that the press check-in at Andrews is at noon. This is on Friday. I don't think we will brief on Friday. Baggage call is in Room 87 of the EOB up until 10:00 on Friday, or you can take your bags straight to the airport with you.

Q Is there earlier check-ins for those who bring bags to the airport?

MR. NESSEN: Same time.

At 12:35 the press plane leaves, and at 2:30 the press plane arrives at the Orlando Jetport.

The President leaves the South Lawn at 1:05, leaves Andrews at 1:25, and arrives at the Orlando Jetport National Guard Tower at 3:20.

Now, it is possible that there will be some activities here Friday morning that you would be interested in covering. If there is, we will put a bus on, and the bus will leave here at 11:30 going to Andrews.

Q What do you have in mind for Friday morning?

MR. NESSEN: Things are coming up all the time here.

Q Signing of a bill or vetoing a bill?

MR. NESSEN: That is possible.

Q What time would that bus leave?

MR. NESSEN: At 11:30, if we decide that is going to be needed. We will make a final call tomorrow.

In Florida, the first event is Friday at the Sheraton-Orlando Jetport Inn. At 4:00 Sigma Delta Chi is sponsoring a news conference for local and regional reporters. As I say, it starts at 4 o'clock, and it is at the Sheraton-Orlando Jetport Inn. It is the ballroom.

Q Does that mean we won't be able to ask any questions?

MR. NESSEN: I guess that is right. Sigma Delta Chi people set it up.

Q Did they say national reporters?

MR. NESSEN: They asked for the opportunity to arrange a news conference, and the White House agreed.

Q When does the President plan to have a press conference in which he answers questions on national and international affairs by members of the press corps?

MR. NESSEN: He met with 38 members of the White House press corps yesterday for over an hour.

Q He met with 38 members of the Bud Sperling breakfast group.

MR. NESSEN: Who are Washington reporters.

Q Not the White House, though.

MR. NESSEN: In any case, there is no news conference planned for this week in Washington.

Q Will that be on Statewide television?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Is he going to say anything before he goes into the news conference?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to go straight from the motorcade to his room, take it easy for a little bit and then go to the news conference.

Q Was there a transcript available of the Sperling breakfast?

MR. NESSEN: Only to the people who went to the Sperling breakfast.

Q Then you can't count that as a news conference. If I don't have access to it, you can't call that a news conference.

MR. NESSEN: I am not calling it a news conference. Jim asked when will he answer questions from Washington reporters, and I said he did yesterday.

Q I said from White House reporters.

Q He said when will the President have a news conference, is what I heard back here.

MR. NESSEN: That was the first question, and I said there is none planned for this week.

Q Since when are reporters barred from doing their legitimate business? We cover the President. We should be allowed to participate in every news conference.

MR. NESSEN: Helen, you know he goes through all sorts of different formats for answering reporters' questions, including White House news conferences.

Q But you said this is an open Administration.

MR. NESSEN: It certainly is an open Administration, and you know it.

Q Is this a new campaign strategy, to hold fewer news conferences?

MR. NESSEN: No, it isn't.

The next event is to leave the hotel at about 5:10 and drive in a motorcade, a brief motorcade, to a reception for President Ford Committee volunteer workers, and the President will speak there shortly before 6:00.

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Q How many, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: About 400.

Q On the press conference, is that an hour long or thirty minutes?

MR. NESSEN: It is thirty minutes. Then the President will speak there starting a little before 6:00.

Q Where is it?

MR. NESSEN: It is called the Officers Club and I am not sure whether that is a private club or an officers club.

Q It is probably at McGrory Air Force Base.

MR. NESSEN: It is only three minutes driving time from the Club to the plane, so it must be an Officers Club at the air base. That is where he will greet the PFC volunteer workers.

After that, he goes back to the plane, leaving at 6:15, and gets to Ft. Lauderdale International Airport at 7:15. He goes from the airport to the Bahia Mar Hotel. He goes up to his room and stays a while. Then, in the same hotel, he goes to the ballroom at 8 o'clock for a briefing for 450 elected officials of Broward, Dade and Palm Beach Counties, as well as Chamber of Commerce officials of those three counties.

Q Did you say 450 are elected or 450 including elected?

MR. NESSEN: Both categories add up to 450.

Q The filing time after the press conference looks critical. How much time will we have before we have to get on the press plane?

MR. NESSEN: Actually, during the reception with the PFC you would have filing time, it seems to me, because the news conference ends at 4:30 and the President boards Air Force One at 6:15, so it is an hour and forty-five minutes.

Q Is there not open coverage of the meeting with the volunteers?

MR. NESSEN: There is open press coverage, correct.

Q So if you want to cover both the news conference and the open coverage thing, you would have to be in the motorcade and you would have less than thirty minutes.

MR. NESSEN: You would be a little squeezed.

After the briefing on the budget, which lasts an hour, until 9 o'clock and includes a question and answer session, there will be a little informal reception for those people who are attending the budget briefing, lasting another hour, and then at 10 o'clock the President goes up for the night.

The first event on Saturday is at that same hotel, the Bahia Mar in Ft. Lauderdale in the ballroom where he will meet with, again, PFC volunteer workers from that area.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: It is 8 o'clock. And he will speak to the workers at 8:35 and will leave at 9 o'clock, so the event lasts an hour, from 8:00 to 9:00 with PFC volunteer workers in Ft. Lauderdale at Bahia Mar. Then he drives to Ft. Lauderdale International Airport, departing at 9:30, and gets to the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport at 10:15 where he takes a motorcade to a place called Williams Park in St. Petersburg. The motorcade is 20 minutes long.

This is basically a public speech with people simply invited to attend and to watch the President's speech in a public park. I don't have a crowd estimate for you at this time.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: What we estimate the crowd will be?

Q This is an out of doors event?

MR. NESSEN: Out of doors.

Q Is this by invitation?

MR. NESSEN: Anybody that wants to come.

Q How many invitations will be circulated?

MR. NESSEN: You mean hand bills? You have to ask the PFC. The President speaks there at 10:55 Saturday morning. He leaves Williams Park at 11:30 and goes to a place called the Bayfront Center and the Bayfront Center has a room called the Neptune Room where he will meet PFC volunteer workers -- about 400 there also -- speaking to them at about noon.

Q Is the speech in Williams Park a real campaign stump speech? Is it a campaign speech?

MR. NESSEN: The whole trip is a campaign trip.

Q But this is going to be a campaign speech?

Q It is not going to be a budget briefing?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Is it political or Presidential?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that--the distinction.

Q Is that going to be questions and answers in the park?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q I think Marty is asking whether the thing in the park is going to be similar to the National Chamber of Commerce thing or whether it will be more of a stump speech.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the text of the speech so I can't tell you what the subject is. This is a park, I am told, where old people sit in the sun quite a lot, play checkers.

Q You have a ready-made crowd.

MR. NESSEN: They play checkers and all that stuff. So it could be that there might be some word on catastrophic insurance for older Americans and all that stuff.

After he meets the PFC workers at the Bayfront Center Neptune Room, speaking at noon, he drives to the Bay Pines Veterans Hospital, getting there at 12:45. I believe that is also an outdoor event where some of the veterans will be outside and the President will greet them. I don't think there will be any formal remarks. He may say a few things to them. He will go inside and tour the hospital. He will either speak to the veterans outside before going in or after coming out.

At 1:20 he leaves the Veterans Hospital and goes back to the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport, getting there at 1:40 and taking off at 1:45 and flying to Pace Field at Ft. Myers, Florida, arriving at 2:35, and will motorcade to the Ft. Myers Municipal Auditorium. It is a thirty minute drive. He gets there at 3:15. Now this is part of an annual event they have down there called the 35th Annual Pageant of Light Festival.



The Pageant of Light Festival is an annual civic event they have there and the President is attending part of it in the Civic Auditorium. It is supposed there will be about 2500 people there. He will speak briefly and then take questions from the audience.

Q What kind of audience is it? Is it by invitation or is it right off the street, first come, first served, civic dignitaries, ordinary citizens, what?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a public event, but I will check for you.

Q How long is that session in the auditorium?

MR. NESSEN: The Municipal Auditorium -- he arrives at 3:15, he speaks beginning at 3:35, and answers questions until 4:45. So it is about an hour and ten minute event and he leaves at 5 o'clock. He goes, again, to a private residence ten minutes away for a reception for PFC volunteers. That starts at 5:10. The President speaks at 5:35 or so and leaves that private residence at 5:50, goes back to Pace Field, gets on the plane, takes off at 6:10, goes to Miami International Airport, arriving at 7:10, motorcades to the Everglades Hotel, arriving at the hotel at 7:35, goes straight in to a reception held by the Federal Bar Association for a while. This event is the annual dinner of the South Florida Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. This is made up of approximately 250 Federal judges and attorneys who practice before the Federal courts along with their wives or husbands and other guests from the law enforcement field.

The President will speak to the dinner at 9:40 and conclude at 10 o'clock. I would think the subject of the speech is probably going to be in line with the President's crime proposals.

Right after dinner he goes to another room in the hotel to greet PFC volunteers from the Miami area. That all concludes by 11:05. He will drive back to the Miami International Airport, take off at 11:30, get back to Andrews at approximately 1:35 and get back to the South Lawn at 1:55. So that is the Florida schedule.

Q Who is the private residence? Whose private residence is it?

MR. NESSEN: It is in the home of the PFC Chairman for Lee County, Mr. Cas Peacock. It is his house.

One thing I did not mention earlier is that the President has, as you know, been receiving reports on the situation in Guatemala and the American relief efforts. It does appear that the proportions of the disaster are extremely large and there have been continuing after-shocks, as you know, so today the President asked and directed the Director of the U.S. AID office, the Administrator, Daniel Parker, to go to Guatemala.

Mr. Parker serves as the President's special coordinator -- in addition to being the head of the AID office -- for international disaster assistance. I am told that Mr. Parker will brief the press today at the State Department on the plans for his trip and bring people up-to-date at the State Department on the current status of the American relief effort there.

Q Is he leaving today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he is leaving today.

Q What time is the briefing?

MR. NESSEN: 12:35.

I guess that is it.

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Q Does the White House have a reaction to the public jobs bill the House passed yesterday evening?

MR. NESSEN: This is the second bill, isn't it?

Q This is the one that would extend the current program, plus added another 280,000 jobs?

MR. NESSEN: The President proposed his own public service jobs program in his budget, which was instead of allowing the program to die on June 30 when it would currently die, to extend it at the full rate until December 31 and then an additional nine months of a phase-out period as the economy picks up and as more and more people get permanent jobs.

That is his own proposal, and that is the one he believes is best.

There has not been much time to analyze that bill specifically, but it does appear from a first analysis that the estimated cost of that bill is considerably higher than its sponsors have indicated.

I believe they are using a figure of \$6 billion, and I think the White House analysis shows that by our estimates the figure is really \$7.2 billion over the 20-month period.

I think you know the vote in the House was close yesterday, and the President noticed that and felt that was a sign that the Members of Congress are beginning to feel that they ought to live up to the fiscal responsibilities they are always talking about.

Q You didn't answer his question. Is he going to veto it?

MR. NESSEN: That was not his question. He said what did the President think of it.

Q That was my next question.

MR. NESSEN: It has only gone through one Chamber, and I am not going to say.

Q Haven't you already said he is going to veto that?

MR. NESSEN: No, I have not.

Q How about the public works bill?

MR. NESSEN: The public works bill he will veto later this week.

Q When will he do that?

MR. NESSEN: Time is running out. It has to be either tomorrow or Friday or today.

Q Can we rule out today?

MR. NESSEN: The time is not set yet. Just to elaborate, he wants to write a message explaining his actions, and when that is completed, we will schedule a veto.

Q Would you rule out Friday morning?

MR. NESSEN: I would not, no.

Q Today?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it is not going to be ready today.

Q Ron, the President's Medicare proposal now, according to Administration officials, is going to cost twice what the Administration first estimated. By the same logic, will the President drop his Medicare proposal or scale it back?

MR. NESSEN: No. What happened there, Jim, was you probably know that the exact proposal for the catastrophic insurance -- is that the one you are talking about?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The exact provisions of how that was going to work were really not decided until the very last minute, but the budget had to go to the printer sometime before that, so the budget estimates were based on what the provisions were thought to be at the time the budget went to the printer.

Later, the President decided on other provisions which will raise the price somewhat, but he will ask for the money to finance that, extra money.

Q What is the relationship between that and your fiscal responsibility charge that you make against the Congress all the time? Why wouldn't the same logic compel you either to drop the catastrophic illness proposal or scale it back in order to stay within the budget?

MR. NESSEN: This is a proposal that the President feels is needed for the reasons he stated when he announced it, and he intended to finance it at whatever it cost, and the estimate of cost given in the budget was based on what he thought the provisions would be at that time.

Q Do you take the position what the President feels is correct does need to be funded and what Congress feels to be correct does not need to be funded?

MR. NESSEN: No. You know that the methods of financing Medicare have been revised in other ways so that I believe the net cost is a drop, isn't it? I think there is something like a \$2 billion drop in the net cost of Medicare because of other revisions.

Q Outside the budget?

MR. NESSEN: You know, the question of raising slightly the monthly cost of the insurance, putting the ceiling on the amount of increase there can be in hospital and doctor fees and so forth.

If I remember the budget figures correctly, there is a net decrease of \$2.2 billion in the cost of Medicare. Now, if you add the extra \$500 million to pay for the miscalculation on the catastrophic insurance, you would end up with a net drop of \$1.7. We will check those figures for you.

Q What is your assessment of the inflationary impact of that increase?

MR. NESSEN: \$500 million? It is still a net decrease, Jim.

Q Increase in fees paid by people, right?

MR. NESSEN: Fees paid by people?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: It amounts to 70 cents a month, or 30 cents a month.

Q Have you done an inflationary impact study? Are you satisfied there will be no inflationary impact?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Just to follow up on your line of thought there, the inflation, of course, hits people who live on fixed incomes harder than anybody else, and that includes older people, and that is one of the reasons why the President has gotten the inflation rate down by half and wants to get it even lower, because the Federal deficit, a large one, contributes to inflation and it hurts the people who some of the spenders in Congress claim to be helping, which is the elderly people and those on fixed incomes. It is a hidden tax imposed on them.

Q It is the fees paid by those persons, however, that will go up, right?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is 70 cents a month, or something like that.

Q Along the same line, is the White House figure--estimate--of \$7.2 billion for the public service jobs bill over a 20-month period, is that a net or gross figure; that is, does it include or exclude the anticipated savings in welfare and food stamps and does it include or exclude the additional revenue that comes to the Government in tax receipts when more people are working?

MR. NESSEN: You know it is very complicated to try to figure that out, Ted. I think one of the complaints about this bill is that it would provide money in a way that would enable States and cities to transfer people who they are paying now out of municipal or State revenues and take the Federal money and use that to pay their salaries.

So, there is no clear indication what the net increase in employment will be, since some of these people--the States and the cities could use the money to simply keep the money they are spending on payrolls and use Federal money to pay the same people.

Q Has William Scranton been offered a job, the U.N. post replacing Moynihan? Can you confirm that story?

MR. NESSEN: I can't confirm the story. Several people are under consideration. We will have an announcement soon, but we don't have one today.

Q You won't say if he has been offered the job?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because we never do.

Q Ron are you prepared to deny he is one of those under consideration?

MR. NESSEN: I am just going to handle it the same way all the personnel appointments are handled, Mort. When we have somebody to announce, we will announce him.

Q Ron, did Clare Luce see the President recently, in the last few days?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Could anybody find out? Does anybody know?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen her on the schedule.

Q Is a woman being considered in the several people?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to say who is and who is not under consideration. It is not fair to the people, which is the main reason for handling personnel this way. If somebody does not get the job for one reason or another, it does not look like they were rejected for one reason or another.

Q I am not asking you to identify anyone.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know all the people that are being considered.

Q Can you say if the job has been offered to somebody?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to.

Q Ron, has Ronald Reagan been given briefings on foreign policy matters by the Administration?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Will he be?

MR. NESSEN: I forget what the policy has been in the past few years. I will look into it.

Q Hasn't he asked for them?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Vice President Rockefeller is going out to give a series of speeches beginning in a week on what he calls fundamental issues facing the country. They will not be paid for by the President Ford Committee. Is the President aware of this?

MR. NESSEN: He is certainly aware of it. I think mixed in with those speeches, Connie, if you get the full list, you will see he, for instance, is attending a number of President Ford fund-raisers along the way.

He is the featured speaker. He is highly sought after for the President Ford Committee appearances. Just this morning an appearance came up, the President is not going to be able to attend, and the people holding it, their very first choice after the President was the Vice President.

He has been doing President Ford fund-raisers and campaign stops, and will continue to do them.

Q Did the Vice President explain to the President the purpose of these speeches or do you know the reason why he is giving these speeches?

MR. NESSEN: I think you would have to ask him.

Q Has the decision been made on whether the President will return to New Hampshire before the primaries?

MR. NESSEN: There has not been a decision made.

Q Ron, when the Vice President goes out on these trips and attends a fund-raiser, does that mean the committee picks up his tab?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. The President Ford Committee?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, of course.

Q But a Republican Party fund-raiser --

MR. NESSEN: The RNC would pay for it. If he goes as Vice President, then the White House pays for the trip, or his own travel fund pays for the trip.

Q Do you know which ones that are coming up are being paid for by the President Ford Committee? The ones I understand are coming up are all Republican Party fund-raisers.

MR. NESSEN: Either his office or the PFC can give you the full list. I don't have it. There are PFC appearances all through his schedule.



MR. NESSEN: I don't know why there is any doubt that the Vice President is supporting the President. He said so over and over again. He said he expects the President to be nominated. He is campaigning for the President, speaking for the President.

Q Why is he going off to speak on his own?

MR. NESSEN: He is Vice President of the United States, and a man who has been in public life for a long time and has lots of things to say about public issues.

Q They are apparently at some variance with the President's views.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. Why would you think they are?

Q I am curious as to why the Vice President would feel compelled to make these appearances on his own.

MR. NESSEN: I think all public officials make appearances and state what their views on public issues are.

Q And the President heartily approves of this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it is a matter that the President needs to approve or disapprove. He certainly does not disapprove.

Q What is his feeling about it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he has a feeling about it, Helen.

Q He has to have a feeling about it.

MR. NESSEN: Why? He doesn't have a feeling about Bill Simon's speeches or Frank Zarb's or Attorney General Levi's or Don Rumsfeld.

Q He doesn't?

Q What is the policy on clearance of speeches?

MR. NESSEN: There isn't any.

Q What happens if Cabinet members are going out on the campaign trail and, if they do go out on the campaign trail, will their speeches be cleared with the PFC?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. You will have to ask the PFC, but I have not heard that they are.

Q Could I ask the same question about Florida that Jim asked about New Hampshire? Is this contemplated as the only campaign appearance the President will make before the primaries?

MR. NESSEN: When is that primary down there?

Q March 9.

MR. NESSEN: It is possible he will go back again before the primary.

Q Isn't it a little early for a man who has just been named Secretary of Commerce to be out campaigning, making speeches for Ford?

MR. NESSEN: What is the time?

Q I am talking about Richardson. Are his expenses being paid?

MR. NESSEN: When he makes a President Ford Committee campaign appearance, they certainly are.

Q Isn't he supposed to spend a little time in the office, getting acquainted with his new office?

MR. NESSEN: How much time does he spend in the office?

Q He has been there such a short while. He has not even had time to find out about everything.

Q Ron, does the President have any response to Ronald Reagan's criticism of U.S. foreign policy?

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MR. NESSEN: I don't think we ought to, day in and day out, respond to campaign stump speeches. I don't think it makes any sense for the White House to respond to candidates' stump speeches. The President laid out, I thought, his own foreign policy. He has the responsibility of running foreign policy day-by-day and facing the situations in the world. His policy is clear. He talked about it last night over here at this reception fairly clearly. And I don't see that it is proper to answer campaign speeches here every day.

Q Do you think he will address himself to Reagan's criticisms in Florida this week?

MR. NESSEN: I would doubt that he is ever going to directly answer any campaign type stump speech at all. As he said again and again, you know what his policies are. He has the experience and responsibility for running foreign policy and domestic policy. He does it every day on the job. There is no doubt where he stands. He has to take a stand, take actions.

Q But he is not precluded from answering from the White House. We understood that last night that was a direct answer to Reagan.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know where you understood that from, Helen. You have the wrong White House officials.

Q He did not have anything specific in mind when he talked about "warmed over cold war rhetoric?" That was not a reference to Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I did not write the speech. I don't know.

Q You mean he had no response to the criticism that Reagan made yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Such as? What would you expect, Dick? I think there is something like 14 candidates running around out there, Dick, and I don't see that we can make responses to every speech of every candidate.

Q There is only one major challenger within his own party and that was a fairly thorough critique of the Administration's foreign policy. Now you say that if -- I understand you correctly -- the speech yesterday was not in response to the criticism.

MR. NESSEN: We are not, as a matter of policy, going to respond to stump speeches by candidates.

Q Ron, so we won't make any mistake about this, would you say that the President was not referring to the Secretary of State when he talked about warmed-over cold war rhetoric?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he was not referring to the Secretary of State.

Q Ron, the President said in New Hampshire several times that his first obligation was to be President, but he was able to get time on weekends to go out and support his own candidacy. How do his Cabinet members find the time to go out during the week?

MR. NESSEN: I think the same way. They make it up on weekends and at night and coming in early in the morning and they take stuff with them to work on on the plane.

Q I would like to go back to a subject that has been a favorite of mine. I understand the members of the Sperling group were given a transcript of the meeting.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q And only members of the Sperling group were given transcripts. Was that an Alderson transcript?

MR. NESSEN: It was.

Q Paid for out of public funds?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure how those things are paid for.

Q But, at any rate, they are not paid for out of your pocket or the President's pocket or likely the Sperling group?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Why, then, is not that transcript available to all of the rest of us now that it has been printed in the newspapers of that very select group of reporters?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, look, we have been through this about three days now. I understand the seriousness of your concern and it seems to me that the President by now must be up around 60 private interviews. I just don't think that the White House Press Office should be in the position of making sure that every single person gets the same thing that every single other person gets who covers the White House. The President is invited to participate in interviews by lots of people in this room and gives as many as he can and I don't see the requirement that everybody else in the room, in effect, be a participant in the interview by getting every word that the President says to everybody else.

Q If I may pursue this. I am not asking for those transcripts in advance, but it seems to me that once the deadline has passed, or at the time of the deadline that we all have -- it seems to me -- we all have access to those transcripts as part of the historical public record of this President. And the fact is if you print up transcripts and make it available to a select group of reporters, I think that is highly discriminatory and I don't see how you possibly can defend that.

MR. NESSEN: Those are the reporters that took part in the interview.

Q That is quite clear to me.

MR. NESSEN: The interview you and Jack had was your interview and as far as I know you got a transcript or NBC got a transcript.

Q That transcript was available at the time we were conducting the interview and the interview was going on the air.

MR. NESSEN: It was a live interview. I forgot that.

Q And the interview I did with the President later for the foreign policy special was not to be released until Monday night, but we made an effort to get it released at 6 o'clock because it had news value and the White House made a transcript that afternoon and distributed it to members of this group and to all other news organization that day so they would have access to it at 6 o'clock that night as well.

MR. NESSEN: We do have a file copy that we keep for our own files, and if anybody is interested in looking at any of the transcripts, they can come and look at them.

Q When are the transcripts going to be available?

MR. NESSEN: Of what?

Q Of these various interviews.

MR. NESSEN: Whenever the Alderson people get them typed up.

Q Are you suggesting all of us come up here and crowd around one transcript?

MR. NESSEN: If there is a burning need to see the transcript, we have a file copy.

Q It certainly is. We are covering the President of the United States. There is a burning need.

MR. NESSEN: We have done this same thing three times.

Q Are you saying you are now going to make them available?

MR. NESSEN: I always said we have file copies and if you want to look at them, okay.

Q You have not said that.

MR. NESSEN: Maybe I have not been clear about it. There is a file copy.

Q What about making Xeroxes of your file copies?

MR. NESSEN: Look, Mort --

Q Seriously.

MR. NESSEN: I am serious. I just don't see there is an obligation to make sure everybody has everything that everybody else has.

Q Once it has been published, I don't see how you can withhold it from us. That seems to me the more relevant point here, that once it has been published in the newspapers of those members of the Sperling organization who have been handed, on a selective basis, a transcript, why the rest of us can't have access to that as well, I think that is an indefensible position on the face of it. How can you make that a policy of the White House? This is not a closed corporation.

MR. NESSEN: It is not a closed corporation, but it is a President who gives very frequent private interviews.

Q And once they are out, we all have access to them is my point.

MR. NESSEN: Tom, we have gone up this road three times. I understand your position.

Q I want to lodge an official protest to the President against this policy and we will send him a letter to that effect.

Q My feelings on this are not as strong as some of the others, but I do understand their position. But I want to ask, as a man whose job it is to present the President in the best possible light, what do you see, from a professional standpoint view, from your view as a public relations officer for the President, for not releasing it? Is there some reason?

MR. NESSEN: The reason is what I said to Tom. We never had a firm policy on this. Sometimes we put them out and other times we did not put them out and then we thought we better see what we were going to do permanently on this and it struck me that since he is a man who sees reporters privately at a fairly active rate, that it just seemed to me contrary to the whole idea of enterprise reporting, requesting interviews and that kind of thing, to make sure that each and every person had the exact same thing that everybody else had.

Q Enterprise reporting consists of getting something first. These reporters who see the President are getting it first. Then the question becomes the matter of public policy, a matter of taxpayers money, a matter of freedom of information, a matter of the open White House that you boasted about at the beginning. It becomes a matter of democracy and it is no longer a matter of enterprise reporting. Enterprise reporting consists of getting it first.

Let me ask you a question. Each week the White House puts out sort of -- weekly Presidential Documents, it is called. Each time the President holds a regular press conference, a full-scale press conference, whether it is in the East Room or wherever it might be, that press conference appears in the Presidential Documents, the white sort of booklet kind of thing. Are any of these more numerically restricted interviews that he has given, such as Sperling group or New Hampshire editors or whatever, are any of those being put into Presidential Documents?

MR. NESSEN: They are not.

MORE

Q I don't understand how when the President's press conferences are put into that thing as a matter of public record and as a matter of taxpayer's money and so forth -- the same facilities of the White House are being used -- how you can put in one press conference and exclude another press conference, which is what you are doing, in effect.

MR. NESSEN: They are not press conferences, Jim. They are private interviews.

Q They are public statements by the President of the United States.

Q How can you put one in and exclude the others?

MR. NESSEN: You have to ask the people who run that thing. I don't know.

Q Obviously, if you want them in, the Press Office can instruct them to be included. This is your decision, if you want to make it.

MR. NESSEN: It is not, Jim. I don't know who those people work for, if they work for the Archives.

Q You mean if you wanted it in there, you could not get it in?

MR. NESSEN: I have never tried to put anything in there.

Q Is it not the case that they reproduce in there everything that is released publicly by the White House?

MR. NESSEN: They are the Archives people.

Q There really is an important historical concern here. If you are trying to keep a record of what the President has said about this subject and that subject, and if you want to go back and see where he changed his mind, it is much more convenient to have Presidential documents with all those materials in there, with indexes and that kind of thing, than to have to come over here and rummage through 60 or 70 private interviews that the President may have had.

For the sake of keeping accurate records, for the sake of understanding what the President's thinking is, I strongly appeal to you to reverse this policy and, if you don't want to release the stuff simultaneously, at least for heaven's sake release it to Presidential documents so there is a record that is available.



MR. NESSEN: Let me take another look at it in light of the strong feelings expressed again and again.

Q Another thing. How many times have we sat in briefings and asked you for a Presidential something and you say, "Walt, I refer you to the remarks he made"? You can't refer us to the remarks he made at the Sperling breakfast because we don't have access to that.

Q Will the United States recognize the MPLA as the Government of Angola?

MR. NESSEN: It does not plan to now, no.

Q Is that connected in any way with the Zaire meeting?

MR. NESSEN: The recognition question or the NSC meeting?

Q Is the NSC meeting in any way connected with the Zaire meeting?

MR. NESSEN: We don't tell what the subject of NSC meetings are.

Q Should there be any significance attached to the fact they are back to back?

MR. NESSEN: Since I can't tell you what the NSC meeting is about, it is hard to answer the question.

Q Has the President had the latest reports on what has happened in Angola?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you say anything about that?

MR. NESSEN: I should not from here report on how the war is going except it is not going well.

Q Ron, was there a transcript of the talks before the military-minded, defense-minded people?

MR. NESSEN: Either a transcript or a tape recording.

Q Will that be available to us?

MR. NESSEN: The President's remarks?

Q No, I am talking about the other remarks.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if anything was done with those. It was not, I am told.

Q It was not taken?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q When will the President make public his financial records, and will that include his State and Federal income tax returns?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen it in its completed form. It is very close to being finished, and I certainly think we are within two weeks of having it.

Q Can I follow up on that? Does he think other candidates should reveal their State and local income tax returns, whether they paid taxes or not?

MR. NESSEN: I think he said he favors that, yes.

Q Does that apply to Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I think he said all candidates, didn't he?

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

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