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N E W S   C O N F E R E N C E

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:09 P.M. EST

FEBRUARY 27, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think you have probably seen the schedule for today. There are no major changes on it except that somewhere around 1:00 or 1:30 -- I would anticipate closer to 1:30 -- the President will come down and read to you a statement giving his views on the so far unsuccessful efforts of Congress to extend the Federal Election Commission. We will have a printed text to give you.

Q     He will do that in here?

MR. NESSEN: I think he will come down here. I think that will be easiest for everyone.

Q     Is he going to take any questions?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think the statement will be pretty much self-explanatory.

Q     Will the statement say what he will recommend vis-a-vis the Government and the Supreme Court, the Justice Department and the Supreme Court?

MR. NESSEN: It will deal with his view of some of the pieces of legislation being considered now.

On the 30-day extension question, essentially the Administration will not take a public position on the 30 days. They are not a party to the suit, and so the Administration will not take a position on the 30-day matter other than to say that the 30-day extension is not really needed.

If Congress will follow the President's recommendation, which is a simple reconstitution of the Commission along the lines ruled constitutional by the court, you wouldn't need any delay because Congress can do that in the time remaining.

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Q What is the time remaining, Monday deadline?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct, midnight Monday.

Q Is he going to just read the statement or will there be questions?

MR. NESSEN: He will just read the statement because it will be self-explanatory.

Q That is for sound?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, if anybody wants it, it is.

On Florida, I really plan to have the bible and the text of tomorrow's speech sometime this afternoon, late in the afternoon, I would say.

Q 6:00 a.m. embargo?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will make the speech embargo for 6:00 a.m.

Q Which speech?

MR. NESSEN: The speech to the naturalization ceremony in Miami tomorrow. It is really the only speech tomorrow. As you know, there are two speeches on Sunday.

I did see a draft of those, and I think it would be fair to describe them as speeches in which he outlines his record as President that he wants to call to the attention of the voters.

Q Are both speeches on Sunday the same thing?

MR. NESSEN: They are not worded the same, but that is the theme of both speeches.

Q What time will he deliver the Saturday speech?

Q It is at 10:00, isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: There are two, one in Sarasota and one in Tampa.

Q On Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, 10:00. I thought you meant Sunday.

Q It rained yesterday, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Really?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Saturday and Sunday, the same weather forecast holds true for all the cities he is going to be in; that is, daytime temperatures in the 70's, fairly humid -- really, quite humid -- nighttime lows in the 60's and a 30 percent chance of rain both days.

On the naturalization ceremony tomorrow, just by way of a little background for you, there are 1178 people taking their oath tomorrow, or being naturalized as American citizens tomorrow, including 41 children.

Q That is too young to vote.

Q Do you know where they are from?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a precise breakdown for you, but it would be fair to say that the large majority are Cuban refugees, former Cuban refugees.

Q Is that where he makes his speech tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Would you call that a political speech?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not intended to be.

Q They will be voting for the first time this November, will they not?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Or will be eligible to, anyway.

Q If it is not a political speech --

MR. NESSEN: You know, as I mentioned yesterday, at last year's Fort McHenry ceremony in Baltimore where a group of citizens were sworn in he also spoke over there.

This is the largest number of people naturalized at any one time in Miami.

I don't really have any more to tell you about the trip.

Q What is the check-in?

MR. NESSEN: I think the details have been posted on the check-in time. It is an awfully early one, I am afraid.

Q For those who do not wish to or can't bring their grip or bag or whatever tonight, it is the same old story, isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: Have you lost your grip, Jim?  
(Laughter)

Q Is this a warm-up for Saturday night, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Can you bring it tomorrow?

Q Can we bring it a half hour early tomorrow morning?

MR. NESSEN: YOU don't have to bring your bag ahead of time anywhere. Six o'clock is the show-up time with bags or grips.

Q Let me ask a question on the speech. Will copies be available at Andrews prior to 6:00 if we don't get it here late this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: You want to do your morning piece live from there?

Yes, there will be some.

Q What is the estimated time on the speech tonight, for those who want it tonight?

MR. NESSEN: Late afternoon. The President said he was going to give it a final review at about 12:15. I am hoping to get it between 1:00 and 2:00. In fact, when he comes down here, it will be a signal he has finished working on the speech, and we will start typing on it at that time.

Q Embargoed to 6:00 a.m.?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What is the theme of that speech?

MR. NESSEN: The theme of that speech? (Laughter)

Q Angola?

MR. NESSEN: I think it has some of his thoughts about Castro --

Q Mostly negative?

MR. NESSEN: -- and about Cuban refugees' roles in American society.

I have something on the California trip for you. We have finished the Florida trip?

Q Is there going to be anything at the airport?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, coming or going?

Q On his arrival there?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean in terms of a news conference or something?

Q Or anything?

MR. NESSEN: No, there are no plans for anything special at the airport. As you know, Mrs. Ford is down there and she will come to the airport and meet him when he arrives. That is really about the only thing that happens at the airport.

Q You mean she will meet him in Sarasota? She is not going to fly over to Miami? Is she going on the motorcade?

MR. NESSEN: That is what is on my schedule.

MR. SPEAKES: She is not going on the motorcade.

MR. NESSEN: Several of you asked yesterday about the trip to California, scheduled for the 11th and 12th. That trip is being shifted to March 26. If you recall, this was a fund-raising dinner -- dinners, I guess, one in San Francisco and one in Los Angeles.

The change is being made so that the President will have more flexibility in his schedule during that period and more of an opportunity to visit those States which have primaries in early March.

Q Are you shifting the fund raising dinners? Are the dinners being postponed?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct. What will happen is that both will now take place on the 26th. He will fly first to San Francisco for a lunch and then go on to Los Angeles the same day for a dinner, both on the 26th of March.

Q Is this a one-day trip?

MR. NESSEN: No, then he will stay overnight in Los Angeles.

Q Is he going anywhere on the 11th and 12th, then, instead of California?

MR. NESSEN: The 11th and 12th are Thursday and Friday, aren't they? I would expect he would probably use the time over that weekend for visiting a State that has a primary.

Q Illinois?

MR. NESSEN: It actually isn't set yet.

Q Will he do anything on the 27th except come back?

MR. NESSEN: The 27th, it is possible he will make a stop on the way back.

Q Ron, specifically where in San Francisco and Los Angeles will the lunch and dinners be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have those details, really.

Q Do you have under whose auspices, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The President Ford Committee is -- it was a fund raiser for the President's campaign, both of them were -- are, actually -- both are to raise funds for the President's campaign.

Q Does the shift represent a sense of urgency over the State of the President's health in any of the earlier primaries, specifically Illinois?

MR. NESSEN: You mean his political health?

Q Yes, of course.

MR. NESSEN: No, it was just felt he wanted to have this flexibility to use the time in States having primaries immediately and not go out to California on that particular week when he might better use his time in a primary State.

Q When was that trip first laid on, Ron, how far back?

MR. NESSEN: It seems to me it has been at least a month or so since we announced it.

Q Does it mean that week he will not go to California, he will go to Illinois?

MR. NESSEN: He will go somewhere where they have a primary.

Q Does that mean he will go to more than one State that weekend?

MR. NESSEN: Illinois is the 16th, isn't it? It is possible he also might touch base in Wisconsin that weekend.

Q Which weekend?

MR. NESSEN: That weekend, the 12th and 13th.

Q You are talking about two big trips that weekend?

MR. NESSEN: There is nothing laid on that weekend. He is just freeing up the time so he can do it if and when the plans are made.

Q Does the President have any plans to visit Oklahoma City, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: We are talking about the weekend of the 13th and 14th of March. I have not heard of any Oklahoma trip.

Q Is he thinking of going back to Florida next weekend?

MR. NESSEN: It is an option to go back to Florida, but the decision hasn't been made yet.

Q What about Texas, Ron? Is he going down there for that primary?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't gotten that far ahead, Bob. We are working fairly close on this scheduling.

Q Some people in Illinois said there seemed to be an early warning on a trip there next weekend.

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't be surprised to see an Illinois trip the weekend after this one.

Q Illinois and Florida next weekend?

MR. NESSEN: It is a possibility.

Q Wisconsin also next weekend is a possibility?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Ron, Florida and Illinois next weekend?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible. These are all options and no decision has been made.

Q What caused the President to change his heart on the impact of the Nixon trip on his campaign?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean "change his heart"?

Q Change his evaluation.

Q Last night he said it probably did cost him votes.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He has never said that before.

Q The day before he said the Nixon trip had a minimal impact.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see the conflict there.

Q You don't think he has escalated the impact?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see what he said. On Wednesday at the Inland Press Association he said, "I hesitate to evaluate the impact, good or bad, on the election yesterday. My general impression is that there was a minimal impact, but others differ with that, and we will try to assess it as we look at the final results."



Then the next day, after he had a chance to talk to some people who have been looking at the results, he said, "I think the weight of the evidence we have so far-- we don't have all the evidence in--is that it probably was harmful, but I would not want to make that categorical comment at this time."

You know, obviously he has talked to more people and gotten a better idea of the results up there, but I don't see any major shift in his attitude.

Q If it was harmful, is he planning to ask Mr. Nixon not to do things like this again (Laughter) or is he just not going to speak to Mr. Nixon? (Laughter) Does he have any plans to say anything to Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, there are no plans to see or talk to the former President on the phone.

Q Do you have information to indicate that the Soviet Union has decided to buy more American grain?

MR. NESSEN: All we have heard is a rumor and, as you know, there are reporting requirements that if the sales are beyond a certain level, that there must be timely notification of the Agriculture Department, and there has been no such indication.

All we have heard are rumors that there might be another grain sale to the Soviet Union.

Q Where do you hear these rumors from?

MR. NESSEN: In the agricultural community.

Q Like what?

MR. NESSEN: That is really where it stands. There has been no notification and, as I say, there are --

Q Who does that notification go to?

MR. NESSEN: To the Agriculture Department --and to the State Department, too? No, just Agriculture.

Q How about to your special trade representative?

MR. NESSEN: As I think you know, the way grain sales with the Soviet Union are conducted is that the Russian importing agency, whatever it is, deals directly with American private grain traders or dealers.

Q Ron, the Russians have a ceiling of 17 million tons, I think. They have about 3-1/5 million tons to go if they wish.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Does the President have to approve all or part of that 3-1/2 million tons?

MR. NESSEN: You mean if they go beyond the 17 million? If they stay within the 17 million --

Q The President does not have to approve it.

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Before getting off that subject, I know that announcements were made about the reporting procedures being tightened up, strengthened, and so forth and so on. Nevertheless, the Agriculture Department's record for knowing about Soviet grain purchases is not particularly good.

Are you satisfied that you now have procedures in force that will give you a timely notification? Is the White House satisfied that you are going to know about this in time to give it attention before the fact?

MR. NESSEN: The White House is satisfied that procedures have been improved for timely notification. But, as you see, as long as the Russians stay within the 17 million ton agreement that they have, there would be no call to take any action.

Q Of course, I was talking about purchases beyond the limit.

MR. NESSEN: Beyond the limit then you would have to get into negotiations.

Q But are you satisfied you will know about it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Could I ask about the meeting this morning with the Republican National Chairmen?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did the President solicit that endorsement and how was it elicited?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't go to the breakfast, and I don't know the background on exactly who said what to whom, but I believe that they had decided to do that before they came to breakfast.

Q Does the President have any reaction or anything you would like to say about it?

MR. NESSEN: He is very pleased, obviously, to have these leaders representing so many States and so many shades of Republican opinion endorse him.

Q How many were there?

MR. NESSEN: There were nine there, and three others not there who sent their endorsement.

Q All nine endorsed him?

Q It is a total of 12?

Q And you are saying this was completely unexpected?

MR. NESSEN: That it came as a surprise?

Q Yes.

Q You mean, he was having breakfast blind and then they all endorsed him?

MR. NESSEN: No, he knew before they came to breakfast that they were going to endorse him.

Q Did you know yesterday that they were going to endorse him?

MR. NESSEN: I had a strong suspicion.

Q Didn't you specifically deny that yesterday you knew whether they were going to endorse him or not?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear the first part of that.

Q Didn't you specifically deny yesterday knowing what their attitude was on the Presidential campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know at that time whether all were going to endorse him. I knew some were.

Q Was this Morton-instigated?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how it got put together.

Q Ron, how about Mary Louise Smith?

MR. NESSEN: Mary Louise Smith was at the breakfast but did not take part in this, obviously, because she has felt strongly they should not choose between two people who are Republicans.

Q Ron, is she going to have breakfast with Governor Reagan shortly to kind of balance this? If she is present here when all this endorsing comes, doesn't that kind of shade the thing a little bit?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You will have to ask her.

Q You don't know?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q Does the President have any idea how this will affect his campaign, what impact it will have?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked to him specifically about what direct impact it would have, but these are obviously elder statesmen of the Republican Party.

Q Did George Bush send along his endorsement?

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not.

Q That is gratitude for you. You pick him up in the streets of China -- (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

Q The President apparently had on his desk this morning, in addition to a top secret folder, which we couldn't manage to read anything from, the log of the MAYAGUEZ.

MR. NESSEN: I saw that.

Q My question is that in view of Cambodia's charge that the United States is bombing Siem Reap, is the President trying to find out what did happen there and what possible connection it might have with the MAYAGUEZ incident?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what that log of the MAYAGUEZ was or why it was there. It is not related in any way to the charges of the Cambodians, which have been totally rejected out of hand. I will try and find out what that log is.

Q Does he consider the MAYAGUEZ a closed incident?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Is the MAYAGUEZ a closed incident.

Q Is the President formulating a policy about the request of foreign nations for information on American companies bribing foreign officials?

MR. NESSEN: He has a letter which, I think you know, was sent over by Prime Minister Miki of Japan, delivered here earlier this week, which does deal with the issue of payments to foreign officials. The letter is being studied and a reply is being drafted.

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Q While we are on that topic, Ron, how are things coming along with that supposed high level review of steps that the U.S. Government could take to discourage this?

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked but I will. I think I should.

Q Are there any more communications from foreign countries other than Japan?

MR. NESSEN: The only one I know of is the letter from Prime Minister Miki.

Q Referring to Angola, Secretary Kissinger said the United States will do whatever is necessary to prevent the success of another similar effort -- he was referring to Cuban and Soviet involvement there -- does that mean the United States would back the racist government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia if Rhodesia found itself faced with a civil war in which the Cubans or Soviets were backing the black majority in Rhodesia?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I just don't see how I can answer a hypothetical question about a situation that does not now exist. It is somewhat similar to a question the other day about this so-called bridge to Africa and so forth. I just don't want to and won't try to address a hypothetical question about what might happen.

Q Is Kissinger enunciating Presidential policy here?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He is?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, of course, he carries out Presidential policy and speaks for it.

Q What does that bode if the Cubans and the Soviets become involved in other African civil wars? Are we to take Kissinger's word that the U.S. will do whatever is necessary to prevent the success of another similar effort, and I ask specifically with regard to Rhodesia because there is considerable wire copy coming out of that area suggesting that that is another trouble spot?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, the Secretary has spoken. He is enunciating the President's policy. The situation that he describes does not now exist there and I think we will just wait and see if it ever does.

Q Would the United States send military aid --

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I am not going to answer hypothetical questions about wars in Africa.

Q Let me take the question one step further. If you don't like it, you can throw it out.

My question is, would the United States or would the President ask the Congress for military assistance and aid under any circumstances to support the Rhodesian Government of Ian Smith if that Government found itself faced with a civil war similar to Angola?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to answer a hypothetical question.

Q This goes to the policy the Secretary has enunciated. Does this mean that we are allowing the Cubans and the Soviets to determine what our African policy is? In other words, if they do something, then we respond in a place of their choosing rather than our deciding what a policy ought to be toward a place?

MR. NESSEN: I have nothing new to add on the thing today and we can poke and push at it but nothing is going to happen.

Q Ron, why wouldn't this be the place? Are you not the spokesman for the President?

MR. NESSEN: There is nothing to speak about today on this subject, Jim.

Q Ron, if Reagan in New Hampshire -- following this up -- when he first started out he said we ought to tell the Soviets and the Cubans to stop this thing, or else, and several reporters pressed him on that and didn't get very much of a substantial statement.

Now it seems that Dr. Kissinger has enunciated a rather hypothetical statement -- if they do this, we are going to take whatever action is possible. So, I wonder if we could possibly press Walt's question again, and also Mort's. We can't do this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to say.

Q What do you have in the way of projections on next week's activities?

MR. NESSEN: I think there will probably be one or two more Presidential messages to Congress along the lines of the ones he has been sending along. I think there is a chance of probably campaigning in Illinois that next weekend. I don't know of any other specific major events next week.

Q Campaigning in Illinois and possibly Florida?

MR. NESSEN: And possibly Florida, yes.

Q Might there be a news conference next week?

MR. NESSEN: There is not one currently planned.

Q On this weekend schedule, is the speech tomorrow going to deal specifically with U.S.-Cuban relations or also with African policy?

MR. NESSEN: You are going to have the text in a few hours, Mort.

Q You say he will have "some of his thoughts about Castro."

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q In relation to Angola, I assume?

MR. NESSEN: More in relation to the Western Hemisphere.

Q Not including Angola?

MR. NESSEN: I say more in relation to the Western Hemisphere. You will have the text in a few hours.

Q Ron, may I ask a tangential question? Has President Ford, to your knowledge, ever expressed any feelings about the nature of the white supremacist Government in Rhodesia?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, Walt.

Q It is a fair question.

MR. NESSEN: It is a fair question. I don't recall, actually.

Q Mr. Nessen, regarding Prime Minister Miki's letter, we understand that he says that if the Lockheed scandal is left in doubt, it will be a fatal blow to Japan's democracy. He also said specifically, or asked the President to reveal all the details, and he says, "including the names of the Japanese high officials, if any."

I was wondering if you would have initial reaction of the President on this?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to release the text of a letter from a head of Government to another head of Government. We never do. If somebody else in Japan is doing that, and if that is an accurate description -- which I don't know if it is or not -- the President will respond to a private letter from a head of State privately.



Q The text was published on Wednesday.

MR. NESSEN: It may have been published by the Japanese but it was not published here.

Q He has not yet responded?

MR. NESSEN: He is studying the letter and drafting a reply.

Q Your answer dealt with the letter but you were not really asked that. You were asked what the policy of the Government was going to be on requests from foreign leaders for information about bribes by American companies. What is the policy going to be, leaving aside the letter from Mr. Miki?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think you can leave aside the letter from Prime Minister Miki because --

Q That is going to state the policy but you won't tell us what the letter says?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will find out the policy at the appropriate time.

Q What is the policy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have it to give you today, Jim.

Q Which messages will be going to the Hill next week? Do you have that today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Ron, let me ask you about a statement the President made in his interview with Ralph Renick. He said it is not inconceivable Ronald Reagan might be his running mate in November.

MR. NESSEN: That is about the second or third time he has said that. He has said that the past couple of weeks.

Q Earlier he said Ronald Reagan was too far to the right of him to be President.

MR. NESSEN: To be elected.

Q He seems to be saying, if Ronald Reagan were his running mate, he would not want Reagan to succeed him should he not complete his term.

MR. NESSEN: What has the President said? He said it is conceivable Ronald Reagan might be his running mate. On the other hand, he said Ronald Reagan, to his view, is too far to the right to be elected President.

Q He could be elected Vice President because he is far right, but not President.

Q Isn't that contradictory?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Do you have something on the MAYAGUEZ?

MR. NESSEN: We will get the information and post a little notice about why the MAYAGUEZ log is on his desk.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:39 P.M. EST)