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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:50 A.M. EST

MARCH 3, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The reason for the delay is the President had a meeting this morning with a group of Florida editors and publishers totaling about 16 or 17, and I wanted to sit in on that. We will have a transcript, as always, tomorrow after it has been published in the a.m. and p.m. papers.

Q Did he throw out any more words?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has given tacit approval to most of the words.

Q Ron, have you stopped putting meetings like that on the President's public schedule?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we ever did put them on the President's public schedule.

Q Did the President break any new ground in the interview?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear anything too startling.

Q Was it a mass interview?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it was, in the Roosevelt Room.

Q Did he say if he was going back to Florida on Sunday or Monday?

MR. NESSEN: He said a decision has not been made yet.

Q What time will we have a transcript of the interview?

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MR. NESSEN: I think in order to get it in tomorrow's p.m. papers in Florida before it shows up elsewhere, I think we decided on 3:00 tomorrow for a distribution time for anybody who wants the transcript.

We also have in the back a group of students from Hunter College who are attending a seminar in Washington and who are the guests here today to see how a White House briefing goes.

You all know the President met this morning with the Republican Congressional leaders. It was a relatively short meeting. I think it was less than an hour. The two subjects that were discussed were the outlook for the Federal Election Commission and the outlook for the foreign aid bill or the foreign security assistance legislation.

Q What is the outlook?

MR. NESSEN: The outlook on the FEC is that the President really stands where he has all along, which is he believes Congress should reconstitute the Commission in a way that meets the Supreme Court's objections and to approve a simple extension of the Commission's powers through the end of this election, and then after the election take another look at the Commission and see what substantive changes Congress might want to make in the regulations.

But, the President feels to try to make substantive changes in the election laws at this point -- first, you have a campaign that was already begun under old rules and he doesn't think it should be changed in the middle.

Secondly, some of those proposed changes are very controversial, and it could either scuttle the entire election law or else have it so tied up in litigation that it would not apply to this year's election, and the President believes the American people want an election law in place to assure that this year's election will be clean.

Q How is it going to go?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend the whole meeting, actually.

MR. CARLSON: There is a great deal of concern that the legislation will not be enacted prior to March 22.

Q By whom, John?

MR. CARLSON: By several Members of Congress who attended the meeting.

Q Ron, did the President tell them he would veto a bill that came down with the Wayne Hays provision on it?

MR. NESSEN: They did not get into that much detail, Aldo. The President has made reference to the possibility of a veto should the legislation come here in a way that might end up in litigation or might prove confusing to a process that has already begun under the old law, but there was nothing more specific said about a veto.

Q Has the President ever discussed, to your knowledge, how he would go about picking a Commission? Would it be partially Presidential, partially Congressional?

MR. NESSEN: You mean to reappoint --

Q I mean after the election.

MR. NESSEN: No, he has not. He has just suggested that a terminal date be placed on the Commission so that the law could be looked at again in light of the experience through one election.

Q Has he suggested what date, right after the election sometime?

MR. NESSEN: No, there would have to be a certain amount of time when the Commission could stay in existence after the election of November 1976 to clean up its paperwork, file final reports, look over final financial statements and so forth. Sometime early 1977 is the date he is thinking about.

Q Could we follow up on the answer we got a moment ago when the Congressional leaders said the outlook was rather dim and could not meet the deadline by March 22? What was the President's reaction to that?

MR. CARLSON: Or the legislation may come down and have so many objectionable amendments that they would recommend it be vetoed.

Q When will you know about Florida?

MR. NESSEN: I think a decision will be made either sometime today or tomorrow. I think likely today.

Q How does it look?

MR. NESSEN: There is no way to tell.

Q Did the subject of the results in Vermont and Massachusetts or the primary in Florida come up in the meeting with Republican leaders?

MR. NESSEN: When the President came in the room, the Members applauded and then after these two items on the agenda had been covered, Senator Stevens of Alaska said something along the lines of "We all want to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your showing," or something like that.

Then there was another round of applause, and then there was a very brief kind of general discussion of the outlook in the primaries and what is happening.

Q Who was talking?

MR. NESSEN: Just generally around the table.

Q Were they all optimistic?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there was anything startling.

Q If there is a Florida trip, is it going to be Sunday or when?

MR. NESSEN: It has not been decided yet whether to go or where or when.

Q It has to be Sunday or Monday.

MR. NESSEN: It has to be Sunday or Monday.

Q You seem to be less definite than you were on the last trip when you did not think there was going to be such a thing and neither did Callaway. Do you think it is a little more likely now?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, it is exactly where it is now. Some people have recommended for it; some have recommended against it, and it simply has not been decided yet whether to go, where to go or when.

Q Can you tell us which way Rogers Morton is recommending?

MR. NESSEN: I think Rogers already said something publicly about how he felt about it.

Q Can you tell us what Nixon told Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean what Nixon told Kissinger?

Q Did they talk in California?

MR. NESSEN: This past weekend?

Q Monday.

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, they did not.

Q You are aware of the Jack Anderson column?

MR. NESSEN: I heard Jack Anderson was on AM America this morning.

Q Did you check to see if the Secretary of State had talked to the former President?

MR. NESSEN: I did not because my understanding is they did not intend to and did not.

Q This is past. It occurred on Monday.

MR. NESSEN: That they talked on Monday or they talked before?

No.

The way I heard the wire story was Anderson was talking about the meeting that Nixon had with Kissinger before he went to China.

Q Kissinger called Nixon on Monday to arrange for this written report.

Q And they spoke for 15 minutes on the telephone. Wouldn't you check that out for us, please?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, have you talked to Funseth about whether a discussion occurred with the Secretary of State?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Then you are not aware that the State Department has confirmed that Mr. Kissinger spoke with Nixon following the China trip?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q This is all new to you?

MR. NESSEN: All new to me.

Q Has the President talked to the Secretary of State about these matters?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Tom.

Q Wouldn't that be within the realm of your responsibility, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q You don't think so?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: The question that has been asked repeatedly over the past couple of weeks has been answered; that is, how and to whom will former President Nixon file a report on his China trip. I answered that question.

Q That is not the question I asked.

Q Did I understand you to say you would not check the report, if there is a report, that Mr. Nixon talked to Mr. Ford for 15 minutes after he got back?

MR. NESSEN: The report, John, is that the former President talked to Secretary Kissinger.

Q Not Ford?

MR. NESSEN: No, and I said yesterday and I can tell you again today there has been no contact or phone call between the President and Nixon, but if Bob Funseth says that the Secretary talked to Nixon, that is confirmation enough for me.

Q That is not what you said yesterday.

Q Would the Secretary be insubordinate in talking to the former President?

MR. NESSEN: Come on, Frank, let's move on to something substantive.

Q That is not what you indicated yesterday, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: What I indicated was the former President called here the other night or the other morning and said he was sending a written report to the State Department, which is true.

Q You also said the former President had not talked to one of Mr. Ford's aides.

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he had not, and I don't know to this minute he has. You are telling me Bob Funseth has confirmed it.

Q You don't consider this important enough to check?

MR. NESSEN: It does not involve the President, Phil.

Q Ron, when you are asked this time after time, you still say you are not concerned about coming out and telling us here that, no, you don't know of anything. Are people not telling you these things?

MR. NESSEN: Annie, as of this moment everything I have said about any contact is true. Now you are telling me that Jack Anderson reported something and Bob Funseth confirmed it. This is the first I have heard it.

Q Ron, would you tell us the name of the functionary who took the call?

MR. NESSEN: I will not.

Q Does that mean as far as you know the President does not know that Secretary of State Kissinger has talked to Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dick, and I don't know what difference it makes anyhow.

Q The President had made a point in his interview the other day of saying he had no plans to debrief Mr. Nixon and that the Secretary of State did not, either.

MR. NESSEN: Right, and as far as I know, that is the case.

Q Has President Ford talked with Secretary Kissinger about Mr. Kissinger's discussion with Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Phil.

Q Would you check that, please?

Q Ron, you just said that Nixon called the White House. Did you mean to say the former President himself called?

MR. NESSEN: Or somebody connected with him.

Q You still don't know the answer to that question, whether it was Nixon or Jack Brennan or whom?

MR. NESSEN: I think I just said what I am going to say about the arrangements for Nixon to file his written report with the State Department.

Q You indicated yesterday somebody called here and volunteered a report to the White House and was told to send it to the State Department.

MR. NESSEN: Saul, we have a lot of stuff to do involving the President of the United States and his travels and his visits and so forth. Now, I have answered the question I was asked for weeks, how and when is Nixon going to file a report? That is all I am going to say about it.

Q Ron, just to be absolutely clear so we will all understand, do you mean to suggest a conversation between the active Secretary of State, who presumably works for this Administration and reports to this President, that a conversation between that Secretary of State and a former President who has just returned from a lengthy trip to China in which he had extended conversations with both the Chairman and the new Acting Premier, that has no relevance to this White House or meaning to this President, that it makes no difference at all?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know where you got that from, Tom.

Q That is the conclusion we are drawing from your summary dismissal of our inquiries.

MR. NESSEN: It is not a summary dismissal of your inquiries. As I told Phil, yesterday we spent 20 minutes to 30 minutes each day on this matter. I answered a great number of questions. I have answered the question that has been the real subject of curiosity here for some time, which is how and when he would report.

Now, as I said yesterday, I don't intend to get into routine staff matters of who called whom. I think the essential questions have been answered. Now, Secretary Kissinger has his own press staff over there. I am told -- I don't know of my own knowledge -- that Bob Funseth has commented on Jack Anderson's reports. I think I have taken it as far as I can as far as the White House is concerned.

Q There is a new dimension. These are not yesterday's questions that we are asking after all. These are new questions based apparently on new facts as we know them. Can you tell us whether the President is aware that the Secretary of State had this conversation with the former President?

MR. NESSEN: I am not even aware that the Secretary has had the conversation with the former President.

Q That does not mean that Ford is not, however.

MR. NESSEN: No, it does not. I don't know the answer to the question.

Q Will you find out for us?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is Phil's question, and I will endeavor to find out.

Q Ron, a simple question. Why doesn't the President want to talk to President Nixon about what he learned in China?

MR. NESSEN: You know, without going too much more deeply into this, what we have said over and over again, Mort, that arrangements have now been made for the former President to file a report with Secretary Kissinger on what he feels he learned of significance in China.

Now, that report does go to the Secretary and then the next step would be if the Secretary sees anything in there that he feels would be important or beneficial for the President to see, he will call it to the President's attention.

Q That is not the question I asked. Why doesn't the President want to talk to President Nixon about what he learned in China?

MR. NESSEN: This is the process that has been set up, Mort, to obtain whatever information there may be of significance.

Q Why that process instead of another one? Why not a telephone call?

MR. NESSEN: Why can't we go on and find out --

Q Ron, I have a question, if I may. Yesterday you were asked whether there was some set policy at the White House to show that Nixon will not be in contact with either Ford or Kissinger, and you responded, "I don't know that there is any effort to show that, but it just happens to be the fact." My question is, is that policy still in effect?

MR. NESSEN: What is the policy again? I don't remember that question.

Q You were asked whether there was a set policy to show that Nixon will not be in contact with Ford or Kissinger.

MR. NESSEN: Concerning this trip?

Q Concerning this trip.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q And you answered, "I don't know that there is any effort to show it, but that just happens to be the fact."

MR. NESSEN: Well, it was the fact.

Q My question is, does that policy still apply today and, if so, is it the feeling of the White House that Mr. Kissinger is acting contrary to that policy?

MR. NESSEN: I think what we have said all along from really the beginning, before the trip even started, was that there were no plans for the President to receive a report from the former President on his trip. That is the fact, and that is the way it has turned out.

Q Ron, the question was whether there is a set policy at the White House to show that Nixon will not be in contact with either the President or the Secretary of State. You said that is the fact.

MR. NESSEN: I said that was the fact, that is correct.

Q My question is, does that policy stand today and, if so, has the Secretary of State acted contrary to that White House policy?

MR. NESSEN: As I said yesterday, Russ, there isn't any policy. From the -very beginning we have said there were no plans for the President to receive a report. Now, my understanding was, and in fact still is, that there were no plans for the Secretary of State to get in touch with the former President to receive a report. Now, I have learned here for the first time that Jack Anderson said there was some sort of phone call on Monday, and you say Bob Funseth has confirmed that. I have not checked that.

Q I said the State Department has confirmed it.

MR. NESSEN: I have not had an opportunity to look into that.

Q You said earlier that Funseth's word was good enough for you.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q And you said yesterday that the fact was that neither the President nor the Secretary were in contact with the former President. So, Russ' question is, since the Secretary and you now agree that that satisfies you, since the Secretary has been in contact with Mr. Nixon --

MR. NESSEN: I really don't know that, Jim.

Q But you say you are satisfied with the State Department's confirmation.

MR. NESSEN: But I don't know if the State Department has confirmed it.

Q Nevertheless, the question then remains, is Secretary Kissinger out of step or acting contrary to White House policy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what, if anything, Secretary of State Kissinger has done.

Q Ron, wouldn't a senior State Department press officer have some arrangements with these other press officers in the Administration to keep you informed?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely, on matters of interest we certainly do.

Q Aren't you concerned that your answers here have been a little sloppy since you have not known what has shown up on television this morning and certainly the State Department seems to know about it?

MR. NESSEN: Point out to me the sloppy ones and I will see where I went wrong on them.

Q You say as far as you know Secretary Kissinger has not spoken to Mr. Nixon. You said that consistently.

MR. NESSEN: And it remains true, as a matter of fact, up to this moment.

Q That Secretary Kissinger has not --

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge. I have no knowledge of what he has done. What is the next sloppy one?

Q The question is whether or not you are in touch with the State Department spokesman. That is the question, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I am in touch with spokesmen for all the departments and agencies.

Q Why, then, do you know about the Funseth confirmation or whoever it was at the State Department that confirmed this? The idea of you coming out here on a matter of this kind of importance that we have been asking day after day and professing great ignorance and then dismissing it as some kind of triviality I find offensive, frankly.

MR. NESSEN: Tom, I don't think I have dismissed it as a triviality. As I said yesterday and today, we spend 20 or 30 minutes on this each day. I think a large number of answers have emerged from those sessions. The leading question of the past few weeks was how was a report going to be obtained from the former President.

We now know how the report is going to be obtained. I have been in a meeting for about two hours this morning, and I haven't kept up with each development. Now, whether the Secretary has been in touch with the former President on Monday night, I myself, to my personal knowledge, don't know.

It is not a matter that really changes what we have tried to do here in the way of answering questions and providing information about this.

Q Excuse me, the President originally said or said earlier that the Nixon visit to China was politically harmful. Now, if that is the case, does he think that his own Secretary of State's communication with Mr. Nixon would also be politically harmful?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the communication was, if any, Walt. The former President will be sending his report to the Secretary of State because the Secretary of State, of course, is in charge of both implementing foreign policy and gathering information on foreign policy.

Q To pursue that further, yesterday when you were asked about it you said you did not know what State Department officials would be looking at the report. Today you are referring to Kissinger per se.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is that a change in plan?

MR. NESSEN: It is a change in the degree of my knowledge.

Q The report will go directly to Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q When Secretary Kissinger was at the White House this morning, did he meet with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he did. It was one of his regular staff meetings with the President.

Q Do you know whether he told the President he had this conversation with Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether he had the conversation with Nixon or, if he did, whether he told the President.

Q Could you endeavor to find out today whether --

MR. NESSEN: Yes. This is what Phil asked earlier and Tom, too, and Mort and Howard, whether I could confirm that Kissinger had the meeting with Nixon and, if so, did he tell the President about it during their morning meeting this morning.

Q I would also like to know if so, what the President is doing about this.

Q He might have told him, "Listen, Henry, I have enjoyed about all of this I can stand." (Laughter)

Q Ron, would you please see all of us get that when you make that response?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, yesterday you did not say this was a policy, as I read the transcript. You did not say it was a policy but you did say it was the fact of the matter. I am forced to use the word "policy" nevertheless because I don't know any other word for it. What is the reason for this particular course of action?

MR. NESSEN: What course of action is that, Jim?

Q The fact that the former President's report will go not to the President but to the Secretary of State and then if the State Department or the Secretary of State finds matters in it that they think the President should see, it will be given to him.

In other words, what is the reason for that procedure and also for the apparent effort to downplay or minimize this as a Presidential matter?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, we have been doing this day in and day out for three weeks now. You know all the answers.

Q No, we don't.

MR. NESSEN: Let's start at the beginning then.

Q We want to hear you say them.

Q Will you tell us who suggested the format by which the former President will report? Was it his idea to send it to State? Was it State's idea or was it the White House's idea?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Will you find that out for us?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You said yesterday it was Mr. Nixon's.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is he called in and said this was going to be the way the report was going to come in.

Q According to Mr. Anderson's story, it was Henry that suggested he put it down in writing. It is just intriguing, the whole mess.

Q Ron, yesterday you said you would try to answer some of these questions. Are you trying to answer them? You said earlier this morning you have said all you are going to say about them.

MR. NESSEN: The facts I have added today are that the report will go directly to the Secretary and that is really the only additional fact I can add today.

Q You still cannot tell us whether or not it was Mr. Nixon himself who called the White House, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Do you know the answer at this point?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have any further information to give you on the staff process which led up to the information that you have been asking for.

Q You cannot tell us, is that right, whether or not Mr. Nixon, or whoever called for him, was calling to say that he wanted to send the report to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I don't have any further information. You can ask all the questions, but I don't have any answers.

Q As a matter of definition, you do consider Mr. Kissinger more than a functionary?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I certainly do.

Q Will any of this report be made public after it is received by the President?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know that it will be received by the President. I understand the State Department said yesterday that -- am I missing a joke?

Q We want you to give the answers.

MR. NESSEN: We don't know yet whether the President is going to receive all or any part of the report, Fran. I understand the State Department -- you need to check with them. They gave some information yesterday on what their procedure will be for making any of it public.

Q Ron, is the President going to let the former President know directly or otherwise that further public appearances or travel would not be helpful to him?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, first of all, where that conclusion comes from and I don't know what, if any, plans there are for further conversations.

Q He said himself he thought it was harmful.

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to look at the wording, Jim, and get the precise wording and not the paraphrase of it.

Q That is not a precise quote?

MR. NESSEN: It does not sound to me like it is the full quote.

Q Has the President suggested Mr. Nixon go to Moscow? (Laughter)

Q Anything more on the Illinois trip?

MR. NESSEN: Just going through the rest of today's announcements, you know about the trip to the Disabled Veterans, leaving here at about 2:30 with a travel pool. I believe we have the text of the speech out in advance, embargoed for delivery.

Just to give you a little background, the groundbreaking ceremony for this building was on Veterans Day of 1973. This includes not only the headquarters but the archives of the disabled veterans and a public memorial to the 2 million 300 thousand disabled veterans. Over 2 million 300 thousand veterans have been disabled.

The organization itself has 500,000 members. There are now living 2 million 300 thousand disabled veterans. The organization itself has 500,000 members, 280 National Officers. This is an organization, incidentally, which has attracted a large number of veterans from Vietnam.

Q Any idea how much the building cost?

MR. NESSEN: \$3 million 600 thousand.

Q Would you also add, Ron, the building is very similar in design and structure to the J. Edgar Hoover building? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I did not know that. I did not see it, Bob.

At 5:30 the President is going to have a meeting with the staff, the upper level staff at least, of the President Ford Committee as well as a number of members of the White House staff -- about 28 members coming over from the PFC and about 23 members from the White House staff. The purpose of this is first of all, to thank them for their efforts, to review where the campaign has been so far, and to look ahead somewhat to the next events in the campaign season.

Q Where is that going to occur?

MR. NESSEN: That is going to be over in one of the rooms in the Residence.

Q Will that be open for coverage?

MR. NESSEN: No, it will not be.

Q Is the return to Florida subject going to come up at that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think that will be decided at other meetings and probably earlier than that.

Q Will there be any picture at the beginning of that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Will we have any sort of read-out on that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Are any changes planned in the upper level of the PFC that will be announced at that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did you say Florida is not going to come up?

MR. NESSEN: I say the decision on whether to return to Florida for another day of campaigning will not come up or --

Q How are you going to announce your decision on Florida?

MR. NESSEN: I will get the word around as soon as I know what the decision is.

Q Does the President have any secondary thoughts about yesterday's developments, anything new on that?

MR. NESSEN: No, I talked to him about it again this morning. I think, basically, what he said or had me say last night really remains his reaction.

Q Ron, does he have any comment on Senator Jackson's showing?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is not going to comment on the other party.

Q Ron, could you tell us anything about the New York Times reports about President Sadat reporting that the United States made agreements that Israel would not attack Syria and it would do all within its efforts to get the Palestinians into the Middle East peace talks?

MR. NESSEN: Any undertakings or agreements that were made were spelled out in great detail at the time that the Sinai Agreement was presented to Congress. Nothing was kept secret in the consultations with Congress.

Q Ron, did you ever find out -- you were going to check on this question -- what the log of the MAYAGUEZ was doing on the President's desk the other day?

MR. NESSEN: It was presented to him at the same time the steering wheel was presented to him and for some reason it was put into wherever that stuff was kept and he has asked to have it brought back.

Q Ron, will you tell us more about Illinois when we are finished with this?

Q Before we get to Illinois, the President of Mozambique has called for a declaration of war against Rhodesia and there seems to be a great deal of fear that war will break out between Mozambique and Rhodesia. What is the White House's feeling towards this, most particularly in light of the President's comments in Boca Raton when he said he was not aware of any concern of Secretary Kissinger over guerrilla warfare or a repeat of the Angolan situation in Rhodesia.

Is the President now somewhat more aware of the situation than he was a couple of days ago?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I would rather look up what it was he said several days ago because I don't, again, recall the remarks being precisely as you report them.

Q He said he was not aware of Secretary Kissinger's concern over the Angolan situation in Rhodesia.

MR. NESSEN: I would rather if I may check myself on what was said. I can give you some thoughts today, though, if you would like, unrelated to what may have gone before.

Q The first part of the question is what the White House reaction to this is.

MR. NESSEN: First, let me say just what exact wording was used and what reference was made to war is not entirely clear, whether it referred to a state of war or something like that, but in any case I just wanted to call that to your attention. That is neither here nor there, but the President is concerned about the situation in Southern Africa. He is watching the situation closely. The President hopes that any political change in that area can be brought about peacefully without resorting to violence.

Q Is the President concerned about or does he have any knowledge of guerrilla infiltration from Mozambique into Rhodesia and/or any third party intervention, any third nation intervention or support of insurgent efforts in Rhodesia.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't want to from here give a sort of report from the field on what may or may not be happening out there. It is not proper.

Q Does the President welcome or has he made any other comments on the action of the Rhodesian Government to extend the participation to include Black Africa participation?

MR. NESSEN: I think what I would like to say is overall the United States favors having any political changes in that part of the world take place peacefully and without the use of violence.

Q Ron, another election comment. What was the President's reaction to the defeat of Jack Calkins in the Special Election in New York where a Democrat won for the first time in 106 years?

MR. NESSEN: I did not, frankly, have time to check with him on that.

Q Will you check with him?

MR. NESSEN: I can.

Q Is he going to consider Mr. Calkins for another administrative post?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Fran, I have not heard anything like that.

Q Ron, another Africa question. Does this Administration regard Rhodesia and Southwest Africa as being a vital national security consideration to the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Mort, I am sure you kept up with the American view on both of those situations and you know that the United States has repeatedly condemned the South African occupation of Southwest Africa or Namibia as being illegal and at the same time the United States has referred to the regime of Ian Smith as being illegal, so I don't think there is any great mystery about how the United States views those two situations.

Q Can I ask another related question on that, Ron? You say the President is concerned about the situation in Southern Africa and is watching closely the developments and so on. What is he doing to implement this concern? Aside from being concerned, what is he doing about this concern?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know there is anything to do at the moment, Bob. The President has voiced his concern. He has said that political change is needed in both of those situations but that insurgency or violence is not the proper way to bring about the needed political change.

Q For example -- I don't know that this is a fact, I am just pulling it out of thin air. Is he calling for consultation between our representatives and African nation representatives? Is he alerting any of United States Navy forces. That is only a hypothetical thing, as I say, I dreamed up, but that is the kind of thing I am talking about.

MR. NESSEN: The United States, I think, has supported, for instance, efforts by the United Nations to resolve both the Southwest Africa question and the Rhodesian question, and that is more along the lines of what the United States is supporting at the moment.

Q Let me see if I can get at it this way.

MR. NESSEN: Probably not, Jim, but go ahead and try.

Q The President said that in Florida, in Boca Raton, he has said several other times, that he hoped that Congress, and believed that Congress would not make the same mistake twice, referring to the Angolan cut-off as being the first mistake. Was he referring to Rhodesia and Southern Africa when he said that?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am going to leave it right where it is, Jim.

Q You don't know what subsequent mistakes he hoped or what part of the world he hoped this "second mistake" --

MR. NESSEN: I think I said we are not going to comment on hypothetical possibilities.

Q What about the Illinois trip?

MR. NESSEN: The Illinois trip. I think the President will probably be leaving the South Lawn at about 10:20 on Friday and take off from Andrews at 10:40, fly to Springfield Airport in Springfield, Illinois, arriving at 11:30 Central Standard Time. It is an hour and fifty minute flight and you lose an hour getting there at 11:30.

Q 11:30 is the arrival time?

MR. NESSEN: Central Standard Time, that's right.

Then the President goes by motorcade to the Abraham Lincoln Home in Springfield, arriving there at 11:55. As you know, this is a National Park Service event in which a new Visitor Center is being dedicated at the Lincoln Home, but the President also will go on a brief tour of the Lincoln Home.

Q Would you tell us the time on the arrival at the Lincoln Home?

MR. NESSEN: The President gets to the Lincoln Home at 11:55, tours the Home briefly. And then for the actual dedication ceremonies, they begin at about 12:15, and the President will speak at about 12:25 for about 20 minutes, and I hope to have a text of that ahead of time.

Q Do you know what the subject will be?

Q This is the dedication of a Visitors Center there?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q It is not the laying of a cornerstone? It is already built?

MR. NESSEN: The cornerstone is already laid.

Q You said he was going to unveil it yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Then the President leaves there at 1 o'clock and goes to the Forum 30 Hotel.

Q Where is that?

MR. NESSEN: It is in Springfield. And the President will then have some time for staff work and so forth at the hotel and at 2 o'clock he will go down to the Plaza Room of that hotel to have a farm forum sponsored by Congressman Paul Findley of that area. This is made up of representatives of farm organizations and others, including members of the general public who are interested in farm questions.

The President will speak very briefly and then will answer questions from the audience. That will last from 2 o'clock until about 3 o'clock.

Q Will those questions be limited to farm subjects?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how you could. It is just anybody in the audience.

Then the President will have a very brief reception with about 100 PFC workers from that area also in the hotel. That is around the 4 o'clock area and then the President will leave at 4:50 from the Forum 30 Hotel for the Springfield Airport, leaving Springfield at 5:05 and flying to the Greater Peoria Airport in Peoria, Illinois, arriving at 5:45.

The President will then go by motorcade to the Peoria Hilton Hotel where he will arrive at about 6:05 and have some staff time in his room until 7:45 when he will go by motorcade to the Bradley University Field House, arriving there at about 7:55.

At 8 o'clock he will take part in the Everett McKinley Dirksen Forum, which is essentially some opening remarks by the President and then questions from the audience, which is both general public and students. That will last until about 9:10 and then the President will return to the Peoria Hilton Hotel where he will have a little reception with guests and officials of the Everett McKinley Dirksen Forum. And that is the end of the day.

Then on Saturday at 9 o'clock, also still at the Peoria Hilton, the President will have a breakfast.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: 9 o'clock Saturday. The President will have a breakfast at the Peoria Hilton with PFC workers and volunteers. Then the President will leave the hotel at about 9:40 and drive to the Peoria Airport.

Q Before you go further, could I inquire as to whether the press will be put up at the Peoria Hilton?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, they will. The press will be put up at the Peoria Hilton.

At 10 o'clock the President leaves Peoria and flies to the Champaign County Airport in Champaign, Illinois, arriving at 10:25. The President will go by motorcade to the Centennial High School, arriving there at 10:50.

Q Is that still in Champaign?

MR. NESSEN: It is in Champaign, as far as I know.

This is a public event.

Q Centennial High School?

MR. NESSEN: Centennial, yes. The Chambers of Commerce of three cities, namely Champaign, Urbana and Rantoul, are sponsoring this public forum at the Centennial High School which begins at about 11 o'clock on Saturday and the President will speak briefly and then will answer questions from the audience.

Again, this is open to members of the public so the public will be asking the questions.

Then the President leaves the school at about 12:10 and goes to Lyle Grace Farm.

Q What time was that?

MR. NESSEN: 12:10 on Saturday. The President gets to the Lyle Grace Farm at about 12:25. It is called the Lyle Grace Farm because it is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Lyle Grace. The President will make a tour of the farm.

Q What kind of farm? Do you know what they grow? Is it a soybean farm, corn, livestock?

MR. NESSEN: We are going to find out.

Q Where is this farm?

Q Who is Lyle Grace?

MR. NESSEN: He is the owner of the farm.

Q What else does he grow?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have the full details, obviously, of what kind of farm it is or whether he has any special involvement.

Q Or why he was singled out over Joe Smith.

MR. NESSEN: But the President will tour the farm briefly and then will have a buffet lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Grace and some of their neighbors.

Q Do you know where that farm is, East or West of Urbana?

MR. NESSEN: We will get it for you before it is time to go.

Then at 1:20 the President leaves the Lyle Grace Farm enroute to the Redwood Inn in Rantoul, Illinois. He arrives at the Redwood Inn at 1:35. The purpose of that trip is to attend a reception of the Rantoul Community Association. I have to find out what that is.

Q That is the Community Association of Rantoul?

MR. NESSEN: Right. The President stays there until 2:25. It is simply a reception. No remarks or questions. He will go from there to the PFC headquarters in Champaign, arriving there at 2:45 on Saturday afternoon, will talk to the workers in the headquarters and then leaves at 3:10 to go back to the Champaign County Airport, leaving there at 3:30.

Q Could you give the time he leaves the PFC again?

MR. NESSEN: 3:10 and he leaves Champaign County Airport at 3:30 and flies to Williamson County Airport, which is in Marion, Illinois, arriving there at 4:30. Then he goes by motorcade to the John A. Logan Community College, getting there at 5 o'clock.

Now this is a forum in which the President will speak briefly and then answer questions from the audience. I thought this was sponsored by three colleges, three Southern Illinois community colleges; John Logan, Southwest Illinois Community College and the Shawnee Community College. These three community colleges are jointly sponsoring this forum at the John A. Logan Community College in Marion.

Q Is that Southwest or Southwestern?

MR. NESSEN: Southwestern Community College.

So, as I say, brief remarks and then Q&A and that concludes at about 6 o'clock and the President goes back by motorcade to the Williamson County Airport and flies to Andrews Air Force Base. He leaves Williamson County Airport at about 6:40 and you lose an hour coming this way so you get to Andrews at 9:10 Saturday night and then helicopter to the South Lawn, arriving at 9:30 p.m.

Q Ron, is Earl Butz going along on this trip?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the staff list of who is going. It is possible.

Q Ron, I dislike opening old wounds, but my colleague at the State Department says the State Department spokesmen are now saying the White House knew in advance that Kissinger would call Nixon after he got back from China. That is coming from a State Department spokesman today.

MR. NESSEN: Let me check this. I was going to reopen that same old wound, Tom, if you had not opened the same wound.

Let me just say this. I really tried over these past couple of weeks to dig out as much information as I could about this matter even though my own personal view is, as you know, I guess that it does not have a great deal of -- it, measured against a lot of other things that I try to dig up here in the way of information I feel that sometime my time is better spent digging up some of the more pertinent things, at least in my opinion, than this. But, anyhow, I have tried to find out and relay to you as much as I can.

Now, I also, in reviewing my own record of what I have said here, am absolutely convinced everything I have said truly reflected everything I knew. Now all this has come along concerning a Kissinger phone call to Nixon on Monday really during the briefing and also during the two hours when I was in another meeting before the briefing, so let me start with what you have said and see what I can dig out in the way of putting these other pieces together.

Q But you did not know about the Kissinger call in advance?

MR. NESSEN: If there was one, Tom, I did not.

Q I am not saying if there was one. I am saying the State Department spokesman is now saying the White House was informed that Kissinger would call. Were you aware that Kissinger planned to call him once he returned?

MR. NESSEN: First, I don't know whether that is true. If it is true -- and I don't know that it is true -- I was not aware of any such notification to the White House.

Q How could a State Department spokesman be aware of something and the White House Press Secretary, the President's Press Secretary not be aware of it? How could that happen?

MR. NESSEN: Let's determine whether it is true or not first, Jim.

Q Operating on the assumption that it is, could you offer your thoughts on how that could happen?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to find out whether it is true first.

Q Then will you offer your thoughts on how it could happen?

MR. NESSEN: If there are any thoughts on how it could happen? Let's find out what happened first.

Q How do you plan on communicating this to us?

MR. NESSEN: Let's put a lid on until 3 o'clock and by that time we will see what I can come up with.

Q Will you put a note on the wire when you will have a briefing on the subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will have briefing, Saul. I think I will find out what I can and come out and give it to those who are here.

Q Ron, to the same extent, would you try to clear the air about the whole question about how this situation evolved, as long as you are going to make this inquiry? You said yesterday you would try to get the answers. Today you said you felt you said all you could. Could you get the rest of the information?

MR. NESSEN: I will see what additional stuff I can come up with.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 1:40 P.M. EST)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 3:45 P.M. EST

MARCH 3, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: Maybe the best way to do this is to try to piece together for you a scenario of the events as I understand now they transpired.

Event number one, Kissinger was in Palm Springs and phoned Nixon at San Clemente on Monday. I think Funseth has described that conversation fully.

Number two, the Nixon compound phoned the White House later Monday and said that the report on the China trip would be made in writing to the State Department.

Number three, Henry called from Palm Springs yesterday before he left and talked to Brent Scowcroft, and said, "You know, while I was out here I called Nixon," and so forth. As far as Brent was concerned, he just took in the information and that was it. He did not pass it on to anybody. I am sorry, it happens to be the case.

Henry came up this morning for his first meeting with the President in five days and at the opening of the meeting said, "You know, when I was in California I phoned Nixon," and while I wasn't in the meeting between the President and Kissinger -- and in fact, nobody else was, it was a meeting between the two of them -- when I talked to the President later about this meeting he indicated he had not pursued the matter because he did not give it much thought.

Q The President?

MR. NESSEN: When I asked him later about this, he said Henry had told him this morning at 10:30 that he had phoned Nixon and the President said, "I did not give it much thought," and they went on to their other business.

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As I say, I think Funseth has described the phone call. I think Funseth made -- I would not call them mistakes because the way I read what Funseth said, he was saying things like "I assumed the White House knew about it ahead of time," and that "Kissinger probably gave the White House details of the talks."

Well, the fact is that Funseth made the wrong assumptions or wrong guesses and the White House knowledge is, as I said, one, Henry's phone call to Brent yesterday from Palm Springs, which Brent did not share with anybody else, and Henry telling the President directly this morning about the phone call to the former President, which the President said, "I did not give it much thought."

Q Is President Ford aware of the flap that occurred in the briefing room about this, and to your knowledge has he indicated any displeasure of Secretary Kissinger's calling?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't call it a flap, Walt. I think it was certainly a legitimate effort to obtain information which I, at that time, did not have and I do now.

Q I understand that. My question was, was the President aware of the go-round or whatever you wish to call it?

MR. NESSEN: No. First of all, I don't think it was a go-round. The essence of my conversation with him was to get information and not to explain what kind of questions I got in my briefing.

Q My second question was, to the best of your knowledge did he indicate any displeasure with Secretary Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: No. What he said was, "I did not give it much thought."

Q Earlier in the week, both you and the President gave the very clear impression that neither the President nor Kissinger would be talking with Nixon. What was that impression based upon? Were there no orders to the Secretary not to telephone?

MR. NESSEN: No. Fran asked me that direct question -- or someone did -- has the President given orders to Kissinger not to talk to him, and I said no. What I said earlier in the week -- and I did look back just to make sure -- I guess yesterday somebody said, did Nixon tell Kissinger in California how he was going to do this.

As I said, "As far as I know they have not spoken," which was the truth, that as far as I knew they had not. Anyhow, Kissinger was not working on orders or against orders. There were just no orders one way or the other.

Q It does seem kind of odd, and I am sure it does to you, too, that Scowcroft would not mention something like this, being the President's national security adviser, and not Kissinger's assistant.

MR. NESSEN: I am not clear, Bob, whether you mean it was odd he did not tell the President or it is odd he did not tell me.

Q Since he works for the President and not for Kissinger --

MR. NESSEN: Bob, let me say this, if I can. I don't know quite how to put it, but the fact is that this matter, which we do spend a lot of time on and which I have tried to dig a lot of stuff up on, really is of a lot more interest here than it is back there.

I mean, I think the President's reaction to Henry saying, "I talked to Nixon Monday night" and the President telling me "I did not give it much thought" really is an accurate reflection of the fact that people don't spend all their time here worrying about or looking after or trying to find out about contacts with Nixon.

For instance, just to try to give you some idea of where this does fit into the scheme of things, I called Bob Funseth, said "Why didn't you tell me before my briefing today that you were going to confirm this?" and so forth and Bob said, for instance, that he had spent his whole morning getting information about the consultations with Congress on Middle Eastern arms shipments, which are coming up, and he felt that was the most important thing he was going to be faced with today and that was what he spent all his time on this morning, and I spent my time on other things this morning.

Anyhow, that is a very long way of answering a question, but it is a fact that Brent and myself and the President and others don't spend all their time worrying about or thinking about or inquiring about Nixon.

Q Ron, despite the relative importance of how important it is to us here or to back there, if Scowcroft had shared this with you, you would not be out here now.

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish. That indicates I guess why he did not talk to the President about it, because it just did not seem very important to him, either. Some of you may know I see Brent every morning, John and I both do, about 8:30 or 8:45. We go in and spend some time with Brent on foreign matters or security matters and so forth, and each day for the past couple of weeks, since we have been on this subject, I have talked to him about it.

Now, this morning I had a doctor's appointment and John was in the Republican leadership meeting, so of all mornings this was one morning I didn't have my meeting with Brent. He indicates that had we had our meeting this morning, he certainly would have mentioned it to me.

Q Ron, does he read the briefings, the press briefings?

MR. NESSEN: The President?

Q No, Mr. Scowcroft.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he does.

Q So, then, he would have read the briefings of the past few days and the importance that was placed on these contacts with Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q So, one would surmise he would have sought you out to explain this development which would have advanced things a good deal further than we had in past sessions?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I did not have my morning meeting with Brent today because I was at the doctor's and John was at the --

Q You are welcome to say that, but it is not just that it is a matter of herein this room. We have two people running the President's political campaign who go so far as to say if we lose this New Hampshire primary it is going to be because of this guy Nixon. I think that would be a matter of some concern to the President's staff. That is not a question, it is just an observation.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

Q Do you have an answer to that?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, I thought you said it was an observation and not a question.

Q Well, if you would like to observe something -- (Laughter)

Q Would you say it is or is not a reasonable assumption that Scowcroft would have been thoroughly familiar with everything Kissinger has said on this subject of Nixon going to China ever since Kissinger started talking about it, and that being that familiar with it he would not have been surprised by the fact that Kissinger called Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: That is a reasonable assumption, yes. I am sure that the Kissinger phone call came as much less of a shock or a surprise or upsetting development much less so to Brent than to say outsiders or others.

Q Ron, you said the Compound called the White House. Are there any names you could attach to that?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not going to.

Q Ron, some of us have not seen what Funseth said. Can you tell us now whether it was Kissinger who suggested the written report to State or whether that was Nixon's idea?

MR. NESSEN: No. My understanding is what happened is that Henry called the former President and said, you know, "How do you propose to let us know what it is if you think anything is important out of that trip," and Nixon said, "I think I will send a written report to the State Department."

Q In other words, it was Nixon's idea to send it to State and to do it in writing?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding. After that, Nixon's people, or Nixon, called here and relayed the same words.

Q It was not Nixon himself who called here?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to tell who was on either end of the conversation.

Q I am not asking who, I am trying to eliminate the former President.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to do --

Q May I go back to this one comment you have given us from the President about him saying that he did not give it much thought? Did the President not ask Secretary Kissinger anything about what Mr. Nixon told him?

MR. NESSEN: I was not in the meeting, as I say. It was only the two of them. When I did go in this afternoon to explain that further questions had been raised, I think the President got the idea that there was a good deal of interest here in the briefing room, and I sort of explored with him what his reaction was and what conversation they had.

That is when he said he just did not think it was that important.

Q I don't think you really are answering my question.

MR. NESSEN: The details of the conversation between the President and the Secretary I don't know because I was not there. But, the President's indication was that the conversation was pretty much limited to Henry saying, "You know, I called Nixon the other night and we worked out an arrangement for him to send something in writing to the State Department," and then they went on with their business.

Q So, in other words, as far as you know, the President did not inquire in any way as to what the former President might have told Secretary Kissinger in their conversation about his trip?

MR. NESSEN: I got the idea at least there was not any lengthy discussion of the matter, if any.

Q Do I understand you correctly to be saying that in fact it was Secretary Kissinger that asked the former President how he was going to report? In fact, was he asking the former President to?

MR. NESSEN: This is what you will have to get from Funseth. That is what I understand from Funseth was the sequence.

Q Does it touch off any alarm bell either at the White House or of any Cabinet officials when Mr. Nixon calls or is it something that people do not think much about?

MR. NESSEN: Over a year and a half or so there have not been that many contacts. I don't know that there is any general rule that applies to phone calls.

Q Ron, is President Ford at all surprised at the kind of interest in this telephone business?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he has expressed a view one way or the other, Ann.

Q In this event, the scenario you gave us, is there any possibility that people like Kissinger and Scowcroft, as against others on the President's staff -- because their business is not domestic American politics -- don't operate in that frame of mind? I mean, they don't think of it in those terms and don't attach the importance to the political niceties of whether one talks to Nixon or not?

What I am trying to say is, not in other worldliness, but wouldn't they be derelict in their duty unless they explored what they could get out of Nixon, if anything, and while this might have a different political shade otherwise?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, that is a real entrail reading. This is the real sequence of events and the factual developments as they have unfolded.

Q What I am coming to is this. That was my observation. Here is my question. Was there any discussion, planning, orders, anything, among the President's staff to play down publicly the Nixon report, that they knew was bound to come?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think so.

Q Ron, yesterday you were acknowledging a set White House policy that there be no contact between Nixon --

MR. NESSEN: Russ, I said this morning there was no such policy, and I did not say yesterday that there was any such policy. I said that was the fact. Then, as I told you, I said as far as I know they have not spoken, referring to Nixon and Kissinger. Well, I now know differently.

Q The question is, if that were the policy yesterday and 24 hours --

MR. NESSEN: Russ, it was not the policy.

Q But you acknowledged yesterday in the briefing--

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, Russ, I did not. The question was, "There seems to be a determination here to show that Nixon will not be in contact with Ford or Kissinger. Is that some set policy?" Nessen: I don't know that there is any effort to show it. It just happens to be the fact, that is all. At that point, as far as I knew, there were no plans for a contact.

Q But 24 hours before you said that Kissinger was initiating a call to the former President. Was he not aware of the fact that you referred to yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is the other way around. I was not aware of the Kissinger phone call.

Q Ron, as the scenario you outlined indicates, the President played absolutely no role in the decision; one, to get a report and, two, in what form the report would be made? Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, that is correct.

Q As far as you know. That is that dangerous little nice phrase again. Have you asked?

MR. NESSEN: It saves my credibility, Fran.

Q I wonder if you can say now whether there is any plan for Mr. Ford to contact Nixon directly or have Nixon contact the President directly?

MR. NESSEN: There is none.

Q Ron, just for the record, now that the trip is over and the President no doubt has read news summaries of the accounts of the former President having a lengthy meeting with the Chairman and with the new Acting Premier, and reading the accounts of the kind of treatment the former President received, does he still see this as just another trip by a private citizen?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, have you got any schedule, any timetable at all, of when this report is likely to come through, and is there any likelihood we will get any look at any part of it?

MR. NESSEN: Don, I don't know when it is due and what the State Department's plans are, except if it contains something the President ought to know about, the State Department will do that.

Tom, if I may go on BACKGROUND for a moment, if you will allow me to do that, if you look carefully at the Nixon trip -- on BACKGROUND this is -- you will see that the Chinese are very much aware that he is a private citizen, too, because in each and every case where it was possible to compare events that Nixon took part in with events that the President took part in, you will see that the Chinese deferred in every case and gave Nixon a lesser treatment than they did the President in comparable situations, so they are clearly aware of who is President and who is a private citizen.

Q Wait. If I may follow up on that, I am not comparing him to the President. You are calling it just another trip by a private citizen. Do you recall any other private citizen who has been afforded the same kind of reception that the former President received; that is, a lengthy meeting with Chairman Mao; that is, the lengthy discussions with the Acting Premier; a banquet and an exchange banquet paid for by the Chinese, at which he was able to say on his invitation, "The Former President of the United States," which puts him in, it seems to me at least, a category apart from being just another private citizen.

MR. NESSEN: Tom, in terms of did this Government have anything to do with his going, arranging it or being prenotified about it, in that sense he is a private citizen because we did not, and as you know we were told about it after it had been all arranged at 3:00 the afternoon before the announcement.

It was a simple fact that Nixon was the President who made a change in American policy toward China. Now, that happens to be a fact, and it is also a fact that he is a private citizen and went as a private citizen, but historic relationships with China does not change because of that.

Q Has the Administration communicated in any way with the Chinese their thoughts on the propriety and the circumstances of the Nixon visit to China?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dick. I have not heard of it.

Q Ron, one other thing. Did Secretary Kissinger in his comments to the President this morning give him any indication of what he expected in the report? In other words, was there any suggestion that the former President had anything important to report?

MR. NESSEN: According to Funseth's briefing, the conversation between Kissinger and Nixon the other night was really quite brief and did not go into any substance in any real depth.

Q Ron, going back to the conversation between the compound and the functionary, this call would appear to be a follow-up to Kissinger's call to the former President.

MR. NESSEN: Certainly in the time sequence it was, yes.

Q Would the San Clemente party have told the functionary here, "Further regarding the call between the Secretary and the former President, thus and so," and it might be inaccurate to say now Ford did not even hear about it until this morning from Kissinger? Could he have learned about it Monday night from the functionary?

MR. NESSEN: No. I know what you are getting at. The answer is no, the call from San Clemente made no reference, as far as I know, to a phone call from Kissinger to Nixon.

Q Can you now explain the earlier meeting between Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Nixon which took place prior to the announcement of Nixon's trip, Mr. Kissinger's remark to the fact he was not told?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything about it. I think it has to come out of the State Department if there is anything to say on it.

Q There is something I don't understand. Just a couple of minutes ago you on background cited what you obviously think is evidence that the Chinese themselves treated Mr. Nixon as a private citizen, which is what the White House has been saying all along.

Why background? Why not just say that as the White House Press Secretary?

MR. NESSEN: Because I don't want to.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to. I want to put it on that basis.

Q Has there ever been a bottom line figure on how much the Nixon trip cost the taxpayers from the White House?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it cost practically nothing. The Chinese paid for the airplane, the accommodations and the expenses. So, there was no air transportation. There was no per diem for agents.

Q I saw a figure of a quarter of a million dollars, and that is what I was wondering about.

MR. NESSEN: I have seen that figure myself, and it is totally incorrect.

Q Ron, the President has referred to the Nixon trip as "a piece of bad timing for us politically." Does he feel that Secretary Kissinger's call was also bad timing?

MR. NESSEN: What he feels about the call was what he said when I talked to him about it. He did not think that much about it.

Q When the President said in his East Room news conference that Nixon was going as a private citizen and he had no special briefings or in-depth discussions or special official papers on China, did he know at that time that Kissinger had spent two hours recently with Nixon in discussions?

MR. NESSEN: Was that the Monday night meeting they had before the Friday?

Q That was the Monday night meeting before the news conference of either that Wednesday or Tuesday.

MR. NESSEN: First, I don't know whether they met for two hours and, if so, I don't know what the two hours was taken up with.

Q Ron, in terms of the time sequence, it is not clear to me. When did the call to the functionary come?

MR. NESSEN: Monday.

Q Monday night after the Kissinger-Nixon conversation?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q But before Kissinger called Scowcroft on Tuesday?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q And the functionary, I take it, also did not pass it on to anyone like Scowcroft?

MR. NESSEN: Did not pass on the --

Q The notification from the San Clemente Compound.

MR. NESSEN: That it was going to be made in writing to the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: I will. But, I will tell you about another Presidential trip.

Q Does the President have any reaction to the fact the figures now show New York City unemployment up to 12 percent?

MR. NESSEN: I have to check that.

Tonight the President is going to go to a birthday reception honoring Senator John McClellan in the Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office Building. The reception is being sponsored by the Oklahoma Congressional delegation and the Economic Development Commission of Tulsa, Oklahoma, to pay tribute to Senator McClellan, who recently turned 80.

Q Why Oklahoma for Arkansas?

MR. NESSEN: Tulsa, Oklahoma. He helped to get the waterway.

The reception also marks the official observance of the opening of the Tulsa Port of Catoosa, which completes the Arkansas River navigation system, which Senator McClellan helped to bring about.

The President will depart the White House at about 6:25 with a travel pool going with him, and will return here 45 minutes or so later.

Q What would you expect by way of remarks? Anything?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there will be any remarks. I think there will be a lot of mingling.

Q Is pool coverage only?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you, frankly, I think you can go up there and, as a matter of fact, I think some reporters who normally cover the Hill are probably going to be there, but there is not going to be anything to cover. From what the advance people say, he is just going to go in and circulate around and then leave.

Q Will the press be barred from the mingling since there will be other reporters there?

MR. NESSEN: You absolutely will not be barred from mingling. Bob Mead has done splendid advance work and made arrangements for you to go in.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 4:10 P.M. EST)