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NEWS CONFERENCE

#453

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:05 P.M. EST

MARCH 4, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: On the Wholesale Price Index, I guess some of you know that the price index for wholesale products fell a half a percent in February. The White House feels that this is a further confirmation of what the President has been saying -- and other White House people have been saying -- concerning the progress that is being made against inflation. It is expected that this moderation in price increases will be passed along and show up in the Consumer Price Index in a few months.

The press check-in tomorrow is at 9:30 at Andrews with or without luggage. The press plane will leave at 10:00. The President will leave the South Lawn at 10:20 and will leave Andrews at 10:40. There is the loss of an hour in the flight to Springfield, so the press plane will get to Springfield, Illinois Airport at 10:50 Central Standard Time, and the President will arrive at Springfield, Illinois Airport at 11:30 Central Standard Time.

The weather there is rain and cool, and cool means about 30 degrees. To answer a couple of leftover questions from yesterday concerning the plans, the Lincoln Visitor Center is currently under construction and tomorrow will be the sort of official cornerstone laying.

The Lyle Grace Farm is simply a typical family farm in that area. Its products are soybeans, wheat and corn.

Q Did we ever determine it was definitely a cornerstone laying at the Lincoln Visitor's Center as opposed to a dedication? Which is it definitely, a cornerstone laying?

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MR. NESSEN: We are double-checking.

The Community Association that I mentioned sponsoring one of the events is an association of local civic leaders. We are now looking for the bible to be available later this afternoon.

Just for your information, the key speech of this trip, as far as making news, if any, would be the speech to the farm forum tomorrow, and that is sometime around midafternoon.

Q Where is that?

MR. NESSEN: That is where he goes to that Forum 30 Hotel.

Q Embargoed for delivery?

MR. NESSEN: No, I was thinking if there is any interest in it, we might put it out for earlier release, possibly p.m. papers.

Q Do you think we will have an advance?

MR. NESSEN: I am hoping late this afternoon or early this evening.

Q When you say key speech, what theme? Obviously, farm.

MR. NESSEN: Obviously, farm, yes.

Q What do you mean by key?

MR. NESSEN: I mean in sort of weighing the various speeches in terms of what might have some more news value than others.

Q Could you give us a little more background on what he might say?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Will he deal with grain exports at all?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you just wait and see. Frankly, the speech is not completed yet.

Q When will it be available?

MR. NESSEN: Late this afternoon or early this evening.

Q Can we count on it for p.m.'s?

MR. NESSEN: If I can get it on time, I think p.m.'s would be the best way to do it.

Q How about the Lincoln speech? Will that be available tonight?

MR. NESSEN: When I am trying to balance my own resources, I am going to put the major effort on getting the farm speech out and less on the Lincoln speech because I think the Lincoln speech will not have as much substance in it.

Q Ron, have you explained how Lyle Grace was singled out for this honor?

MR. NESSEN: All I know is the advancemen were out there and looking for a typical farm, and they settled on this one. There were no special reasons other than I assume accessibility and the fact it is typical.

Q Is Mr. Grace a registered Republican?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Ann. I don't think he was asked that, but I am sure you can.

Q Would you see if between now and then you can get us some details about him and his farm? How big is it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. It will be in a briefing paper.

The Springfield event is actually the cornerstone unveiling, the cornerstone having already been laid, as it were. This is the unveiling of the cornerstone.

Q Ron, are any members of the President's family going to be joining him on this trip? Jack?

MR. NESSEN: Jack is already out there, I think. Mrs. Ford is not going on this trip, I don't think. We will check.

You saw the event in the Rose Garden.

Bo Callaway was in at 11:45.

Q Can you tell us why Callaway is here?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to give the President a report on a couple of aspects of the campaign: delegate count, update on the money situation, outlook on Florida and discussion of Illinois.

Q Will there be a decision made at that time on whether the President goes back to Florida one more time?

MR. NESSEN: I think some of you who hung around or called in last evening were told it was not expected that the President would go back to Florida. I would say there is still a very small possibility that he could go, but he is not expected to go.

Q Does that depend in part on what Reagan does down there over the weekend?

MR. NESSEN: No, it really does not.

Q What does it depend upon?

MR. NESSEN: For all intents and purposes, he is not expected to go back.

Q Ron, can you give us any feel for why they decided not to make the trip?

MR. NESSEN: Just frankly -- and maybe I could tell you this for your guidance rather than to be printed in the paper -- but we just don't frankly have the --

Q If you want to put it on background, put it on background.

MR. NESSEN: All right, I will put it on background.

Q Is that really necessary?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is.

Mrs. Ford -- on the record -- will not go to Illinois. On BACKGROUND, we frankly just don't have the people to get down there and do the advance work. The staff is just stretched too thin arranging the Illinois trip, and we just did not have the people necessary to make the proper arrangements for a Presidential trip.

Q Is money a factor?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how close to bumping the ceiling they are down there. I guess you need to get that from the PFC.

Q I am a little incredulous about that. I got the same explanation from John Carlson last night. I am incredulous about the fact the White House has the advance people to arrange a trip to Fairbanks, Alaska; Peking, China; Djakarta, Indonesia, Manila in the Philippines, and Honolulu, Hawaii, and you don't have the advance people to go to Illinois and then Florida a day later.

MR. NESSEN: Incredible as it may seem, it is the truth. The advancemen are really worked to the nub, frankly.

Q Ron, is the President taking Florida for granted? It will have been nine days between his last visit there and the primary.

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think you know he is not taking it for granted. He considers it a very close race.

Q Are we back on the record?

MR. NESSEN: Back on the record. The President considers Florida a very close race. There are no, as far as we know, fresh polls. Former Governor Reagan's people, as you know, said at one point they were ahead two to one. They now say they are ahead 55 percent. We don't have any fresh polls except a feeling that it is going to be very, very close. The President thinks he will win because the momentum is carrying him forward, but by no means does he take Florida for granted.

Q Why not go back, if it is such a close race?

MR. NESSEN: As I explained, it is physically not possible to make the arrangements necessary.

Q So, Illinois is more important at this point in terms of exposure?

MR. NESSEN: Don't put words in my mouth, Ann. I told you we don't have the people to arrange a Florida trip.

On today's schedule, the Medal of Honor ceremony in the East Room, which is open, if you care to cover it.

The President is going to have a meeting with the Energy Resources Council. It will be the first meeting attended by Elliot Richardson as a member of this. The main purpose of it is to receive a report from Frank Zarb, in which he will explain where we stand now in an effort to conserve energy and to meet the goal of independence by 1985.

Q How is that different from the energy message he delivered as a big deal last week?

MR. NESSEN: This is an updated report to the President on how the conservation is coming in various areas and what the projections are.

Q Who is the senior Government official on the Energy Resources Council?

MR. NESSEN: The Energy Resources Council? I have a list of the participants.

Q It used to be Morton. I am wondering if Richardson takes over that role.

MR. NESSEN: Richardson is the Chairman, Kleppe is a member, Carla Hills, Frank Zarb, Bob Seamans, Russ Train -- are the others members or just attending -- Cannon, Greenspan, Lynn, Robinson and Busterud.

Q How about Rog Morton?

MR. NESSEN: He is a member.

Q An incidental member?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is a member.

Q Will he be attending?

MR. NESSEN: He is not going to be there today according to this schedule, but I will double-check and make sure whether he is coming.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: Before that meeting.

Q If not, where is he, on a political trip?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will find out or his office can tell you, if you call them.

Q Is this report going to be released?

MR. NESSEN: I thought we might try something today, if anybody has any interest in it. You know there is nothing classified about Frank's report. If a pool wants to stay in there and listen to the report actually being given, I have no objections and Frank doesn't, if you want to try that. We have been trying this a little bit lately on Cabinet meetings and stuff.

Q Did we ever get that other unclassified information about who it was that called the White House about the Nixon call?

MR. NESSEN: No, we never did get that, Jim.

At 3:00 Congressman Brooks and Congressman Horton are coming in to talk to the President about the revenue sharing legislation. They are the Chairman and ranking Republican on the House Government Operations Committee, and they have important roles to play in moving this revenue sharing legislation forward. I think you are familiar with the President's views on that.

That is basically all of today's schedule. I gave the take-off times for Illinois and so forth tomorrow.

Q Is he going somewhere tonight? Is there a party at the Sheraton Park?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible he may drop in at a birthday party for Congressman Cederberg this evening at one of the hotels, but by late this afternoon we will know one way or the other on that.

Q Ron, do you expect Bo Callaway to come out here?

MR. NESSEN: No, he indicated he did not plan to come out here.

Q He is often here, but he is not on a public schedule that often. I wondered if his being on a public schedule indicated he might have some information or you might have some information?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really. I told you the areas they are going to talk about, but I don't have any details on it.

Q Does the President regard Birch Bayh's actions as some sort of confirmation of his realization of his continuing belief that Hubert Humphrey will be the Democratic nominee?

MR. NESSEN: You know the President's feelings about Hubert Humphrey, often stated, but I don't want to comment directly on Birch Bayh's decision.

Q What are the President's feelings about Senator Mansfield's deciding he will not seek re-election?

MR. NESSEN: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Q He just announced he is not running.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that.

Q There is every indication that Ron Reagan is going to make a very tough foreign policy speech today and you have seen all the stuff in the papers. Do you all have any particular comments on that?

MR. NESSEN: No. On the announcement that he is going to do this?

Q No, that he is really going to take the gloves off now. I know everybody here is expecting an intensified criticism of foreign policy, of the Angolan situation.

MR. NESSEN: I certainly don't have any comment, no.

Q Ron, can you confirm that the President is going back to Illinois a week from today, including the foreign policy speech in Chicago?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you a 100 percent confirmation, but I think it is very likely.

Q To North Carolina the 13th?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is very likely, also.

Q Would attacks by the President's opponent in the primaries make it more difficult for the President to be elected in November, given that he will win the nomination?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to speculate on what another candidate might do this afternoon.

Q Ron, on foreign policy, is he going to make his State of the World thing anytime soon? Might it be the Chicago speech?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible that the speech he will give in the Chicago area -- I think would be a more proper way to say it -- will be a major foreign policy speech. Now, whether it substitutes for a more formal State of the World report to Congress, let's say, I don't really know at this point whether there will be then a separate other message to Congress.

Q When is Chicago?

MR. NESSEN: A week from this weekend.

Q If not Chicago, where?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact place yet.

Q Are you talking about both Saturday and Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the plans yet.

Q When you said you think it is very likely he will go back to Illinois, you do mean the following weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact dates. It could be Friday and Saturday, but I don't have the exact dates.

Q The same time as he goes to North Carolina?

MR. NESSEN: The same weekend.

Q Do you have the staff to do both of those?

MR. NESSEN: We have the staff to do two States, right.

Q Where in North Carolina?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have it, Dick. It hasn't been decided yet.

Q We are not going back to Skokie, are we?

Q Friday and Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: Mort, it has not been decided yet.

Q The State Chairman in North Carolina has announced where he is going to go.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Is that all right?

MR. NESSEN: They are ahead of us because I don't know where he is going to go.

Q Ron, if you know it is going to be a foreign policy speech, can you give us some idea of what will be in it?

MR. NESSEN: I said it might be.

Q What kind of a forum would it be for a foreign policy speech?

MR. NESSEN: A forum that would be interested in hearing the President's views on foreign policy, if that is what he decides to speak on.

Q Ron, did you give a date for Chicago? I may have missed the date, but did you give a date for Chicago or did you just say during that weekend? Do you have a specific date?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime --

Q The weekend after this?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q On the Florida trip, did you mean to suggest that if you had the staff the President would like to go back to Florida?

MR. NESSEN: That would certainly have made it easier to do a trip, if we had the people who could make the arrangements.

Q Where are you going to get the extra people by next weekend, to do two States then?

MR. NESSEN: It is not a question of getting extra people. We have a staff of advancement who have run themselves into the ground, and they have not been home for weeks, and there are a fair number of stops in Illinois and I know you know that you have to have advance people in each city you visit, and they are really absolutely stretched to the maximum.

Q Did you mean to say that if you had sufficient manpower in the advance ranks that he would have gone back to Florida?

MR. NESSEN: The President, I think, has said himself he would like to go back to Florida.

Q If he takes it in his head on Saturday to say, "Listen, I want to go back," there is nothing you can do or Pappy Noel or Eric Rosenberger. They will go. If the President orders his troops back to Florida, we will go, right?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, there is a very small possibility remaining of a trip, but I don't think it is a very big one.

Q Ron, what are the President's views about foreign policy matters generally as subjects for political debate during this campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to give an answer here that is going to be brought up at 4:00 this afternoon, Russ, as reaction to Ronald Reagan. I am sorry.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to the possible dropping of the eleventh commandment by Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to do that, Saul.

Q Does he have a comment yet on the defeat of Jack Calkins back in New York State?

MR. NESSEN: The President regrets the defeat of any Republican.

Q How about one that used to work for him?

MR. NESSEN: He is a Republican, and he regrets the defeat of any Republican.

Q Ron, do you have any idea what specific area of foreign policy the President will cover next week if he speaks about foreign policy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Back to the New York Congressional special election, isn't it of particular concern because this is a district that had not gone Democratic in something like 100 years. It is not just the defeat of another Republican, is it?

MR. NESSEN: That is my reaction to the Calkins defeat.

Q Is Calkins going to come back to work for the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard anything like that.

Q When is the President going to respond to Miki's letter?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, the Miki letter has arrived and is being studied and a reply is being drafted, but I don't have anything today.

Q That is what you said last week. Is there some kind of hold up or is there some kind of nervousness?

MR. NESSEN: No, it takes time to draft a letter to a head of Government.

Q Can you give us any guidance at all as to when something might be expected?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you any guidance because I don't know when anything is expected.

Q Will the President be seeing Ambassador Hodgson, who is in the United States?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen that on his schedule.

Q To continue with the Miki letter question, has a decision been made as to what this Administration's policy will be with regard to furnishing foreign countries the names of companies and company officials who are alleged to have bribed people in foreign countries?

MR. NESSEN: Has a decision been made to furnish the names? If it has, I don't know about it.

Q Or what the policy will be?

MR. NESSEN: If it has been, I don't know about it.

Q Along these same lines, any progress report on the President deciding about that high-level review board?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you the other day, Ed Schmultz, who is in the Legal Counsel's Office, submitted a set of options for how to conduct the kind of review the President wants. There was some discussion of those options, and Ed Schmultz is now putting together another set of options. None of the original set of options was chosen so it is going back to him now for further proposals.

Q To be sure we understand that, what Schmultz is doing is not suggesting measures that could be taken against the companies?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is suggesting ways to conduct the review that the President wants.

Q Ron, do you have anything to say from here on the subject of selling arms to Egypt?

MR. NESSEN: Nothing beyond what I think the State Department probably has confirmed to you, which is that consultations are beginning with Congress on an arms relationship with Egypt.

Q That is as far as it has gone?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Does the White House have any reaction to Mozambique cutting off relations with Israel?

MR. NESSEN: Muriel, probably the same as yesterday, which is that the President is following that closely and is concerned about the situation. He hopes that it can be settled peacefully and without resort to violence.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:30 P.M. EST)