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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:37 A.M. EST

APRIL 1, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: We have here Mr. Byron C. Cutts. His title is Deputy Assistant Director for Forecasts and Technical Liaison at the Arms Control Agency at the State Department, and he is here to try to bring you up to date this morning on where we stand with the threshold test ban treaty.

Mr. Cutts.

Q Ron, before that happens, is he going to tell us anything that was not told at the briefing of the State Department yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: I think he can probably help you with some of the more technical aspects of this.

Mr. Cutts.

MR. CUTTS: Good morning.

I was asked to come here this morning without too much preparation. I was just wondering if everybody could be a little patient because this is a very complex negotiation that we are doing.

However, I think that in a manner of speaking I can honestly say at this moment that I really have no idea what I am talking about.

MR. NESSEN: April fool. (Laughter)

Q I knew it.

Q Is that Sonnenfeldt? (Laughter)

Q Who is that?

MR. NESSEN: He is a friend of mine.

Q Not bad, Ron.

Q Let's give Ron a hand.

MR. NESSEN: I think you should give Byron C. Cutts a hand.

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Seriously, the wholesale price index, as you know, came out this morning. It showed an increase in wholesale prices in the month of March of two-tenths of one percent. Whereas this is a slight increase in the wholesale price index, a slight one as opposed to a decline in February, essentially the President's economic advisers feel that the increase was so slight that it really adds up to a continuation of the stability in the wholesale price index that has been going on for about five months now.

It is one of the factors they believe that can be pointed to as showing progress in economic recovery. However, the President does recognize that it is an increase in the wholesale price index, however slight, and that it is in his view further evidence of the fact that the fight to restrain inflation is not over by any means.

The President, getting a briefing on this this morning, also asked about it and was told of the differences in the annual increase in the wholesale price index.

If you take the level last month, March of 1976, and compare it with March of 1975, it was 5-1/2 percent above the March 1975 level.

Now, if you compare the previous year -- that is, March 1974 to March 1975 -- the increase in that year was 12-1/2 percent. So there has been a considerable improvement in the wholesale price index, but it is essentially stable over the past five months, but the President does feel that the slight increase shows that inflation is by no means completely under control.

On the Teamsters business, the members of the President's staff were in touch with Bill Usery in Chicago pretty much throughout the night and the President placed a call to Bill Usery a little after 9 o'clock this morning and was given a progress report on where the negotiations stand.

At that time, the President told Bill Usery to stay in Chicago "as long as you think it can be helpful," and he also told Bill Usery to keep him posted personally.

Q Aren't the negotiations in Detroit, though?

MR. NESSEN: In Chicago or Detroit?

Q Arlington Heights, Illinois.

MR. NESSEN: Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Was that a joke? (Laughter)

Anyhow, the negotiations are continuing. Bill Usery is staying there to help in whatever way he can and he will be reporting to the President periodically. Their last contact was by phone about two and a half hours ago.

Q What is he reporting? Is he optimistic?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I want to give an assessment of the negotiations while they are still continuing.

Q Did they discuss at all the Taft-Hartley injunction?

MR. NESSEN: Bill, because the negotiations are continuing and because the President feels that it would be best for this matter to be settled through the collective bargaining process -- and he hopes it will be -- I am not going to talk about what might happen if the negotiations were not successful.

Q Has the President set a time frame for how long the collective bargaining process can run its course before he has to invoke Taft-Hartley?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is a judgment that he has made yet.

Q Ron, they are on strike, aren't they?

MR. NESSEN: All I know about the actual strike situation is what I have heard on the radio and read on the wires. I think some Teamsters have gone out.

Q Well, doesn't that mean that we are in a situation where Taft-Hartley could be invoked?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to speculate on what might happen if the negotiations are not successful while they are still going on.

Q If they are on strike, they are not successful.

MR. NESSEN: They are continuing, though, Bob, and there is a --

Q As a matter of fact, to be determined here is whether they are on strike or not.

MR. NESSEN: That is not a question I can answer from here because I don't know. That is something that needs to come out of the --

Q The President does not know whether they are on strike or not?

MR. NESSEN: The President certainly knows and has been brought up to date by Bill Usery. I just can't announce from this podium which Teamsters are on strike and which are not.

Q The White House does not consider this a nationwide strike, in other words?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Bob, the negotiations are going on and the President is hopeful that the collective bargaining process will work. Usery is there on his behalf to help it work.

Last night some of you probably noticed that the lights went out at one point in the White House and I have asked about that this morning. The facts, very briefly, are that a Pepco substation that services the White House complex did lose its power at 10:17 last night. This cut off the commercial electricity to the White House. Pepco can tell you why the electricity went off. But there is an automatic emergency power source here which switched on automatically to service the security, communications and other necessary electric power systems and that went on automatically and without problem.

The President and Mrs. Ford were out of the building at the Republican dinner and the power went back on again at 11:17, which was almost simultaneously with the time that the Fords returned to the White House from their dinner.

Q What I want to ask is whether the automatic system, the emergency system, went on immediately at 10:17 or was there any delay at all before it went on?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was immediate. It was instant.

Q Then, how come the lights went out?

MR. NESSEN: This emergency electric power services the essential communications equipment, security equipment and so forth. It does not service every light in the building.

Q Were the lights off when they came here or were they back on?

MR. NESSEN: They came back about one minute before the lights went back on. They got back at about 11:16 and the power went back on at 11:17.

Q Something does not square because my clock was only 30 minutes slow this morning and you have got an hour of blackout.

MR. NESSEN: Do you live in the same substation area as the White House?

Q I don't know. You will have to check the booth. I didn't know we were plugged in for the emergency system.

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow, the check-in time at Andrews --

Q Will you tell us where Jerry was when the lights went out? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: At Andrews, the show-up time tomorrow is 7:00 a.m. with luggage or without luggage. The press plane leaves at 7:30. The President departs the South Lawn by helicopter at 8:05, leaves Andrews at 8:25. The press plane will arrive at Mitchell Field in Milwaukee at 8:20 Central Time and the President arrives at Mitchell Field in Milwaukee at 9:15 Central Time.

Q Are we going to get a bible?

MR. NESSEN: The bible will be available in the Press Office some time between mid-afternoon and late afternoon, and there will not be any speech text for the first day of the trip.

Q What was the arrival time for the President in Milwaukee?

MR. NESSEN: 9:15 Central Time.

Some of you had inquired yesterday -- and I tried to get back to as many of you as I could and John did, too -- as to a meeting between the President and Governor Connally and, as we told those we could reach yesterday and as we put on the schedule, the President and Mrs. Ford have invited Governor and Mrs. Connally to a private dinner in the Residence tonight and they will come to dinner.

Q Are they the only guests?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q When was the invitation extended?

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

Q Is it a political dinner?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is two couples getting together for dinner.

Q Is it a fund raiser? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It is a \$1,000-a-plate fund raiser. (Laughter)

Q Does the President expect Governor Connally to endorse him before the Texas primary?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I think Governor Connally will have to speak for himself on that. My understanding is that Governor Connally says he expects the President to win the nomination.

Q Well, will he ask Governor Connally to support him?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what they are going to discuss at dinner, Helen. It is a private dinner.

Q Will we have advance copies of the toasts for tonight's dinner? (Laughter)

Q Is the President meeting with Connally at any other point today?

MR. NESSEN: There is a meeting now of the PFIAD with the President and, of course, Governor Connally is in that meeting.

Q Well, he did invite him for a political -- for the Texas orientation, didn't he?

MR. NESSEN: They are old friends, Helen.

Q Ron, you would not want us to read any kind of political thing into this, would you?

MR. NESSEN: I will let you read your own theories into this.

Q Let's ask that another way. You would not, yourself, be surprised if politics was discussed tonight, and the Texas primary and endorsements and matters like that, would you?

MR. NESSEN: It is a private dinner, Jim, and I don't know what they are going to talk about. You probably have just as good an idea as I have.

Q Could we get Connally out here some time today?

Q Say, after the dinner? (Laughter)

Q Will a small writing pool go in?

MR. NESSEN: Probably not.

Q Ron, Congressman Derwinski this morning said that he has asked Secretary Kissinger to show him the cables containing the Sonnenfeldt statement which Governor Reagan referred to last night, but that in his words McClosky's people are claiming executive privilege.

Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt asked us to believe them and don't show us any evidence. Very few Members of the Congress believe what the Secretary says any more because there are so many inconsistencies.

I wonder just what Kissinger is doing and whether the President is not often finding out things about foreign policy after the fact?

My question is, how does the White House feel about this and why doesn't the White House order the State Department to release the cable and the memo in order to maintain this open Administration, clear up this issue which is being brought up?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that the State Department had withheld the summary of Hal's remarks from Congressman Derwinski. I know that Hal, himself, has talked to the Congressman, and others at the State Department have, to relieve his concerns.

Q Well, you said it was classified, I think, in the transcript.

MR. NESSEN: It was classified.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because classified documents are given to Members of Congress all the time.

Q Yes, but why can't the press see this so they can compare Kissinger's letter with the actual memo and what Evans and Novak have said?

MR. NESSEN: That is a matter that you have to take to the State Department. It is a State Department document. What I have tried to say over the past few days is what the President's policy towards Eastern Europe is.

Q Ron, is Governor Connally under consideration for any Cabinet position or other position in the Administration?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, we never say who is under consideration or not under consideration.

Q Are they going to come out?

MR. NESSEN: The PFIAD people?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: We can find out.

Q What about the President's reaction to Ronald Reagan's speech last night, which took a few jabs at him?

Q That is when the lights went out. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Actually, it is, isn't it? (Laughter)

Well, I think Rog Morton, as the campaign chairman, has commented on the speech and I guess that basically is all that is --

Q What did he say?

Q We cannot get any reaction from the President, himself?

MR. NESSEN: You know, it was a paid political announcement and Rog has responded to it as the chairman of the campaign.

Q Has the President seen the broadcast or has he seen a transcript of it?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has seen neither one. He had a text a little after 6:00 last night and kind of glanced through the first couple of pages and has not had time to finish it since then.

Q Has he seen a tape of it?

MR. NESSEN: He has not seen a tape.

Q Is he going to?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q There is one available here if he wanted to see it, right?

MR. NESSEN: No, because the power did go out last night, which -- (Laughter). Seriously.

Q Ron, you said President Ford was going to speak at 9:45. I noted that that was significantly delayed so that he didn't begin speaking until precisely the same time as Governor Reagan, which there is no contrivance here at all, is there?

MR. NESSEN: No, there is not. I didn't go to the dinner but I am told that the President's speech was delayed because some of the preliminaries ran longer than anticipated, but our schedule and the President's schedule, which he, himself, has to follow, showed him speaking at 9:45.



Q How did the President get a copy of the Reagan text 4-1/2 hours before broadcast?

MR. NESSEN: The same way that everybody here did, which was that the PFC sent someone over to the Reagan headquarters on K Street to get some copies and took them back to the PFC and sent a couple over to the White House.

Q Although Morton has responded, there were a couple of serious issues raised there, especially the part about Kissinger. I understand that he has disavowed all that.

MR. NESSEN: I am told that he has responded to that.

Q Do you have any comment on that in particular?

MR. NESSEN: I am told Henry has responded to it, Bob.

Q You don't have anything beyond what he said?

MR. NESSEN: You know, he obviously knows what he didn't say better than anybody.

Q Ron, Kissinger is coming into the news quite a bit lately for many things that he said and did and so forth. Has the President spoken to him about any of these revelations and the final days and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, but I don't sit in on every private talk between Henry and the President. I have no indication.

I think your question is, has he talked to Henry about the excerpts of this book that have appeared?

Q I mean, has the President asked him whether they were true and if they were true, of course, then he should have known the President and Vice President of the United States should have been told that such things were happening.

MR. NESSEN: You know, I don't know that they have talked about the book. I have not heard that they have.

Q Ron, is the President concerned at all that a man that he has just had close discussions with on foreign affairs seems to kiss and tell?

I am serious. Is he concerned now that he meets with Kissinger that maybe things are going to be revealed later on that --

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can answer that question, Aldo.

Q It has not affected their relationship?

MR. NESSEN: I think you heard the President speak himself on his relationship with Dr. Kissinger.

Q Not lately.

MR. NESSEN: I think so, Helen. I think probably every weekend whenever he goes campaigning at least one of the questions is always about Dr. Kissinger.

Q Then back to my question yesterday. Does the President have any awareness of whether he is being taped or whether aides are listening in when he has a conversation with Kissinger, which seems to be a modus operandi?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it is a modus operandi and I did not check that question that you asked yesterday.

Q Will you do that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I intend to.

Q Ron, the President I understand is pretty four square in his support of Kissinger and I assume that has not changed.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q But there are people, as you well know, advisers to the President, who feel that Kissinger has become a political liability.

MR. NESSEN: Which ones are they?

Q Well, quite a number of them that I talk to say it at very high levels, they don't want their names attached to it but they went to the North Carolina primary and they say that Kissinger is there. I wonder how the President feels about Kissinger -- whether he is a political liability, asset, neutral?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think he has answered that question every weekend he goes out, John, and I am sure he will tomorrow, too, and I think you probably know the answer to it also.

Q In general, doesn't he generally talk about the fact that he has great respect for Kissinger's competence, he does not really talk about anything --

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes, he has pointed out the public opinion polls which show that Henry's favorable rating is as high or higher than anybody else in public life in America today. I think you are probably familiar with the same poll. He has also pointed out the trust and faith that leaders of foreign countries have in Dr. Kissinger which has contributed considerably to the American role in moving toward peace in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. I think you probably heard all of those from the President.

Q But the polls were not taken of just conservative Republicans. I mean, does he feel that Kissinger is a political asset among the conservative Republicans also?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't want to -- it reminds me of an old Lyndon Johnson joke which I won't tell but --

Q Oh, come on, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: You know, I am not going to respond to the question because by responding to it I will make some news where there is no news to be made on this issue, John.

Q There is news. The Secretary of State is being accused of many things, there have been many revelations that are questionable in terms of his conduct, vis-a-vis the President, ethical sense and so forth. I honestly do think that it is very valid now to ask if the President's opinion remains the same.

MR. NESSEN: I can assure you it remains the same, Helen. As I said, each weekend when he goes out or when he has a news conference or an interview he is asked the question and he answers the question. I don't feel that I have anything new to contribute today and it would be wrong to, I think, write a news story saying that the White House defended Kissinger today because he doesn't need it.

Q Oh, yes, it would be very valid to write that.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it would be very incorrect to write that.

Q Why? Aren't you defending him?

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you that I am repeating what the President has said each weekend or each time he has been asked this question since he came to this office, and there is nothing new today.

Q Does the President feel these charges being made against Kissinger are totally fair?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you, Phil, that since there is nothing new to say on this issue today it would be best to ask the President again, as he is asked each time he appears before the public.

Q Are you saying you are not defending Kissinger in the face of these new charges?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, Jim. We have five minutes before the ceremony. Let's settle into some serious news questions.

Q Ron, first of all, are there any plans for a press conference here in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Not this week. I don't have any real feel of what next week is going to bring.

Q Well, let's talk about the period, if I might, just to finish that thought. I asked you yesterday not only about this week but about the very brief period -- that is to say, one day next week -- before the Wisconsin primary. Monday, in other words.

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate a news conference on Monday.

Q How about Tuesday, Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: I say I don't have a very good feel of what next week is going to be like.

Q Ron, on Governor Connally, since the President will be spending time in Texas during the month of April, to your knowledge, will Connally play either a public or any other role where the President is concerned? Will the President visit him, or in any way at all?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Ron, you said yesterday you would check and find out what was the President's reaction to the clergyman who described Washington as a slaughterhouse.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't check.

Q Could you get a check on that?

Q Ron, has the President or Rog Morton specifically asked Connally for an endorsement of the President, or do either of them intend to?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Could you find out?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, does the President hope to meet with Connally again on any of his trips to Texas?

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

Q Has the President asked the ex-Governor to take part in any fund raising dinner? Has the President or his associates asked the Governor to take part in the fund raising efforts for the President down in Texas, a dinner?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, either. It might be better to direct all these questions to the PFC since they involve politics.

Q Ron, were you able to check on whether the President has filed his income tax return yet?

MR. NESSEN: He is very close to, but, as far as I know, he has not yet.

Q Ron, the President obviously is aware of the effect of this Sonnenfeldt thing on the ethnic minorities. Especially in Wisconsin it seems to be very important. Why is it that he is resisting all the suggestions that he come out and say something about it?

MR. NESSEN: I think some of you know that he has a luncheon tomorrow in Milwaukee with a number of leaders of the ethnic communities. After the news conference he has a lunch at Maders Restaurant in Milwaukee in which he will have lunch with a number of the Greater Milwaukee Ethnic Organizations, about 40 people altogether. It is a working lunch, no speeches and no toasts, et cetera, and I am sure that --

Q What do you mean by that?

MR. NESSEN: What I mean by that is that the ethnic leaders, if they have concerns about American policy in Eastern Europe, will have that opportunity to sit around the table over lunch and bring them to the President's attention and he will have the opportunity to reiterate his policy on Eastern Europe.

Q How many people?

MR. NESSEN: About 40. How many of those are ethnic leaders and how many are White House staff, I don't have a breakdown, but there will be 40 at the lunch altogether.

Q Is that open?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a press pool, at least for parts of the lunch.

Q Do you know which ethnic backgrounds of Eastern Europe he is meeting with representatives of?

MR. NESSEN: The organization is called the Greater Milwaukee Ethnic Organizations.

Q Polish?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the breakdown now. I will certainly have it for you before we get there.

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Q How did that get on the schedule, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it has been on the schedule.

Q You gave it to us on whatever day it was last week -- Thursday, I think -- and it was not on there.

MR. NESSEN: This is a schedule that -- you know, the schedules change and events change and are shifted and so forth. Now on the schedule that was prepared on the 30th of March, this event appears.

Q Well, now, when was it added? When was this event put on? Was it put on before or after the Evans-Novak column appeared?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know because I don't know when the Evans-Novak column appeared and I don't know when the luncheon was scheduled so I can't answer either question.

Q It was not on the original schedule, however.

MR. NESSEN: What original schedule?

Q The one you outlined the other day.

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall.

Q Ron, is that a private luncheon or will there be a pool there?

MR. NESSEN: I said there will be a press pool for at least part of the lunch.

Q Well, now, wait a minute, Ron. I looked in the transcript. As it happened, I was not here Tuesday so I had to go to the transcript to find out what had happened.

MR. NESSEN: We have about two minutes before we have to go over to this ceremony.

Q This is not in the material that you gave out on Tuesday which was March 30 and it was not in there because I took down every event that you gave, so it has been added since the 30th.

MR. NESSEN: Just a minute. We will get what we put out Tuesday and see if it was there or not.

Q I can tell you that it was not.

MR. NESSEN: Gay says she thinks she remembers typing it.

The camera crew and sound engineers should leave now for the East Room ceremony.

Q What did the President and King Hussein discuss as the next steps in the Middle East performance?

MR. NESSEN: Well, this release that we put out on Tuesday said 12:00 noon luncheon, Maders Restaurant, Milwaukee. We didn't list the group that he was having lunch with, but obviously it was theirs.

Q It was not on the schedule that you put out.

MR. NESSEN: No, it is here, Jim.

Q I know it.

MR. NESSEN: This is what we put out the other day.

Q Two things. First of all, it was not in the briefing transcript. I didn't see that.

MR. NESSEN: This is what we put out and it has a lunch at Maders Restaurant.

Q But it does not have the name of the organization.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Ron, I think the question really is, was the President concerned about the fact that maybe some East Europeans -- Americans now -- are concerned about the policy towards Eastern Europe and was this luncheon set up to calm their fears?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the background on the lunch is, John. If they have any concerns about his policy, this will certainly be an opportunity to express them and for him to tell his policy on Eastern Europe, but I don't know what the background is on it.

Q Mr. Derwinski has made it very clear that --

MR. NESSEN: It would not surprise me, though, that this lunch was arranged to enable the President to discuss his Eastern European policy with the ethnic leaders. He is aware of their feelings about Sonnenfeldt's alleged remarks, I mean, he knows about that, and Congressman Derwinski has relayed his views and so forth. I don't know specifically what the background on the lunch is but it seems logical to me that it was arranged as an opportunity to talk about this.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.