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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:39 A.M. EST

APRIL 7, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think you have pretty much seen the schedule today. I have nothing to add to that.

Q Why not? What does that mean?

MR. NESSEN: As far as the trip to Texas goes, I hope that later today we can put out a summary schedule. The cities remain as they were yesterday. The check-in time at Andrews, I would now look for it to be at about 7:30 Friday morning. The overnight is at the Fairmont Hotel in Dallas. The return from there is going to be really quite late, or quite early, depending on how you look at it.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: It is not really locked up yet, but the President could get back to the White House considerably after midnight on Sunday morning.

Q That is quite late.

MR. NESSEN: I want to remind you of one thing when you see the summary schedule this afternoon, and that is that we are dealing with three different time zones on this trip -- the Eastern Time, the fact San Antonio and Dallas are on Central Standard Time, and El Paso is on Mountain Standard Time. So you might want to recall that.

Q Amarillo?

MR. NESSEN: Amarillo is Central Time. So, El Paso is really the only Mountain Standard Time there.

Q Ron, do you know about what time we will be getting into Dallas on Friday?

MR. NESSEN: It is not really locked up yet. On one of the tentative plans it is 4:30 in the afternoon, but that could easily --

Q Arriving in Dallas at 4:30?

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#475

MR. NESSEN: Dallas time, yes. But that could easily change.

Q Is the first event there a closed meeting? I had heard that.

MR. NESSEN: As of this tentative schedule, the answer is no.

Q Is there going to be a late affair in Dallas on Friday night?

MR. NESSEN: Again, this is tentative, but -- what do you mean?

Q Do you think we will be free by 10:30?

MR. NESSEN: It might be right on the 10:30 area.

I don't have anything else.

Q Can you give us as full a fill-in as you possibly can on what the President told the Congressional delegation this morning about foreign aid?

MR. NESSEN: I think what you are interested in is contained in a letter that the President sent to Speaker Albert yesterday. This letter provided really the basis of the President's remarks this morning and I think probably the easiest way to do it would be to Xerox it and hand it out.

Q That was not released anywhere yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: It has not been released, as far as I know, up to now. It is a letter from the President to Speaker Albert. It lays out the President's views on transitional quarter funding under the foreign assistance --

Q You have nothing to add about what is in the letter?

MR. NESSEN: I think the letter is a clear statement of the President's views and does coincide with what he said this morning.

Q Did he talk at all this morning about the current domestic problems in China?

MR. NESSEN: No, there were only three topics on the agenda. The first was the flu shot situation; the second was kind of a briefing by Secretary Kissinger on the Lebanon situation; and the third was the foreign aid bill. These were the only three things discussed.

Q What about last night's NSC? Did that take up the China situation?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware there was an NSC meeting last night. There is a meeting today, but we don't normally discuss the topics of NSC meetings. There was none yesterday, to my knowledge.

Q Ron, what about the discussion on Lebanon? What can you tell us about that?

MR. NESSEN: It was really basically a factual briefing on the situation there. I think some of the Members came out and were asked specifically about any American involvement and they reported quite accurately that the Secretary said there were no plans for any American involvement.

Q Ron, anything beyond that? Supposing Syrian troops entered Lebanon? What would be the United States' position on it?

MR. NESSEN: The United States is opposed to unilateral military intervention by any foreign country, as we have stated repeatedly here.

Q But what will happen in the event there is? Some say there are Syrian troops in Lebanon already.

MR. NESSEN: I will not speculate on what will or will not happen if an event did or did not take place.

Q The Speaker said the Secretary said emphatically if that happened U.S. troops would not be involved.

MR. NESSEN: Without relating it specifically to a speculated upon event, the Secretary and the President have made clear there are no plans for American military involvement in Lebanon.

Q The Speaker was asked directly about that hypothesis -- if Syrian troops moved in. He said the Secretary said American troops would not be involved at that point.

MR. NESSEN: At any point.

Q Regardless of any contingencies?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, there are no plans for any American involvement under any contingencies, which has been said before.

Q The other day I asked you whether the President was ready to state a position on oil divestiture. You said you might have something later in the week.

MR. NESSEN: I checked on it and the fact is that the advocates of the divestiture legislation say that their purpose in advocating it is to, number one, increase the production of oil in the United States and, secondly, to lower the price of oil in the United States.

The President, who has spent a great deal of time on the energy problem, has never seen any evidence that indicates to him that a break-up of a major segment of the oil industry would result in either increased production or lower prices.

The President does not think that the advocates of this bill have made the case to support their claims and, in fact, the President feels that there is at least a chance that the divestiture bill would really retard domestic production rather than increase it, that there is at least a chance the bill would retard rather than expand domestic oil production and, therefore, increase the vulnerability of the United States to disruption from foreign sources or the ever-increasing price increases by foreign sources.

So, until the advocates of such legislation can prove that their idea would put us in a better position on energy, would lower prices and would increase domestic production, the President is opposed to divestiture proposals.

Q Is this the first time he has publicly opposed that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know but it is possible that it is the first time. I don't know, frankly, whether it is the first time or not.

Q Ron, will you give us in some way a definitive statement of policy from the President on what the United States' view is toward the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union? There has been a great deal of discussion about this, but as far as I am concerned, perhaps others, there is now no clear-cut definitive policy statement as to where the United States stands.

MR. NESSEN: Let me get you the transcript of last Saturday's statement by the President in Milwaukee, which I will, and also any number of definitive policy statements put out in the past in messages to Congress, in annual reports and so forth. It is all there in print. If necessary, I will pull them together for you. There is no change of policy from what has been stated and certainly no change from the President's most recently stated policy on Friday in Milwaukee.

Q Ron, is the President pursuing any further protest notes to the Kremlin about the harassment of American diplomats in the Soviet Union?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't checked that lately, Dick. Let me do that, or check with the State Department.

Q Are there any plans for Governor Connally to appear with the President on any of the stops in Texas?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked lately with any of the people down there making plans, but I have not heard of any plans for Governor Connally to come along on any part of the trip.

Q What was the President's reaction to Admiral Zumwalt accusing Dr. Kissinger of falsehood and denying that he caused the Admiral to be threatened with court martial three days before his completion of his term as Chief of Naval Operations, and also Zumwalt's accusation that Kissinger held up aid to Israel and then blamed it on -- in other words, Zumwalt said it was Kissinger who held up the aid to Israel and then it was Secretary of Defense Schlesinger who did so?

MR. NESSEN: What was the President's reaction to those allegations, Les?

Q No, what was the reaction to Zumwalt since his broadcast?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked to him about it or heard him offer any reaction.

Q Do you know whether this is true or false, that Kissinger threatened Zumwalt with court martial?

MR. NESSEN: I do not know.

Q Would it be possible to get an answer?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure the State Department can help you get one.

Q You are sure, Ron?

Q You want to bet? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I am sure that that is the proper place to address your question, anyhow.

Q What do you have to say today about yesterday's election returns, primaries?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I don't know if you were here when the President stepped out in the Rose Garden to talk to some businessmen briefly who were here for the business meeting, and so forth, but I think probably he gave his own personal reaction about as well as anybody.

Q Then I have a follow-up question. Looking -- as I am sure the President continues to do -- at the Democratic primaries, does he still think it is likely to be Humphrey?

Q He said that, too.

Q Ron, if, as the President said, the results in Wisconsin fortified his faith in Secretary Kissinger, would a defeat in Texas eradicate that faith, weaken it?

MR. NESSEN: There is just no change in the President's often stated view of Secretary Kissinger, and I don't expect any.

Q I wonder if you could follow up. If I may follow up some earlier questions that the Secretary of State has said -- this was all rumor at the time -- that Schlesinger held up aid to Israel. Then, as the story goes on, it was said the final determination was made here in the White House, and because it was made here in the White House, can you check out whether it was Kissinger that held up aid or Schlesinger?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have to address that question to Secretary Kissinger's press secretary at the State Department.

Q I think it is a fair question. Was the President speaking only of Wisconsin as approving of Secretary Kissinger as a political asset or is he speaking now for the duration of the campaign?

MR. NESSEN: As I said publicly and told some people privately, I do not expect the President's often stated views on Dr. Kissinger to change and that election results, primary results, here and there are certainly not going to change the President's views of Dr. Kissinger, which are based on quite different facts.

Q Ron, the President is saying the Wisconsin results eliminated the Kissinger issue from the primary --

MR. NESSEN: I, unfortunately, stepped in and didn't hear the remarks in the Garden about Dr. Kissinger.

Q He said, in effect, Wisconsin was a referendum on Kissinger. It was a different context.

MR. NESSEN: Did he really? I am not going to elaborate on what he said, Tom.

Q You join the President in that endorsement, don't you?

MR. NESSEN: I always reflect the President's views.

Q When the question was asked of him this morning by one of the Michigan people, he laughed out loud when he heard the question. Does he ever express himself to you on the number of times this matter comes up among the citizenry, not the press, necessarily?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q He has not?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has often pointed out the polls, which indicate that Dr. Kissinger continues to have high popularity in the public.

Q Was he upset with these friends and aides who keep running around the city and the country saying Henry is going to go next year?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I think we dealt pretty thoroughly the other day with this and I passed on to you the President's view that everybody in the Administration and the campaign should know his view and follow his same line.

Q Does he have anything to say about those people who are just flat out ignoring what he said?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that anybody has since he passed that word.

Q Has he passed that word, Ron? That is the question I don't think you have answered.

MR. NESSEN: Publicly, I have done it for him; directly to Rog Morton, yes.

Q The President told Morton?

MR. NESSEN: The President himself didn't talk to Rog, but someone here on the staff did talk to Rog relatively early that morning.

Q And told him what?

MR. NESSEN: Told him what I said here, which is the President's views on Dr. Kissinger and how the President expected everyone in the Administration and the campaign to follow those views. I think if you then saw Rog's news conference in Arizona, I guess it was, you then know that he now understands the President's position.

Q What about Mel Laird? Has anyone talked to Mel Laird about not saying these things any more?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what Mel Laird said, but I am sure that from the public print he now knows --

Q Is he still a good friend and close political adviser to the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can really in a few words summarize the relationship between the President and Mel Laird.

Q You don't know whether it has changed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you are suggesting in the way of a change.

Q I just wondered if the President still considers him to be one of his political advisers in the campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really know enough about the relationship --

Q Maybe he didn't before.

MR. NESSEN: -- to spell it out.

Let me say one thing. We have a summary schedule for Texas for both days, with a general outline of the events, which Larry will pass out at the end of this briefing.

Q How can you be the President's Press Secretary and not know of the relationship between the President and Mel Laird? (Laughter)

Laying all laughter aside, how can you possibly hold this position and not know enough about your boss to know that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is entirely my job to be able to describe in great detail a relationship among friends that goes back many, many years, Sarah.

Q You are supposed to know this and you acted like it didn't happen, like it doesn't exist. You act like they are not even friends and you don't know anything about it when Laird has come out here with a major statement, very much involved with this campaign, and you are acting like it doesn't mean anything.

MR. NESSEN: I don't really know what Mel has said.

Q Last night Mel told two of us that he is the one that wants to go -- "he", meaning Kissinger. Now, I am just wondering, if I could, that as a preface, does the President feel the public is liable to be slightly skeptical that Kissinger on one day is a scarred warrior and the next day is a political asset?

Hasn't this transition come a little rapidly? If Morton says this, presumably with candor, to the California Republicans and then the next day, I mean, doesn't it kind of suggest an automated operation, or something? What is the President's reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I think you all know the President's views on Secretary Kissinger. I think those people who are in the Administration and in the campaign should know the President's views and should follow them. The President has indicated that.

Q Ron, the President's answer consistently to any question about Kissinger is that he is welcome to stay as long as --

MR. NESSEN: How did we get into the Kissinger question? Nothing is new about it.

Q He brought it up in the Rose Garden this morning.

MR. NESSEN: Oh.

Q The question is always answered by the President that Secretary Kissinger is welcome to stay as long as he is President. I just wonder whether the President has had any indication of what the Secretary's feelings are? Has Secretary Kissinger indicated he wants to stay or thinks that, as Rog Morton said in California, maybe after seven years in these kinds of difficult positions he might want to do something else?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer.

Q Ron, are you saying that the President directed someone on his staff to let Rog Morton know that he was incorrect and, if so, would you please find out who that was?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it was quite as formalized as "Get on the phone and tell Rog." It was --

Q -- suggested?

MR. NESSEN: As I mentioned here the other day when somebody asked me how would Rog learn of the President's views, I said I thought it would be probably Roy Hughes and it was Roy Hughes. It was a phone call but it wasn't any sharp order to get on the phone.

Q How did Roy Hughes get the message from the President? Directly?

MR. NESSEN: He was in a meeting at which this came up.

Q Senior staff meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, Mel Laird has indicated that Secretary Kissinger has told him he will not stick around in the new Ford Administration. I guess the question, if you haven't asked, is that I would like you to ask the President --

MR. NESSEN: I think this is Ed's question and I said I didn't know.

Q Would you direct that question to the President the next time you see him?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You said you had not asked; is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there some reason you are not asking?

MR. NESSEN: No, there are just a lot of other things I have to talk to him about.

Q About 10 days ago the President told reporters that anything that involves a criminal investigation, "I don't think it is appropriate for me to comment on." Two days later, he said, "I am absolutely sure Bo Callaway will be completely exonerated. He was absolutely honest."

Is that second statement not totally inconsistent with the first?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: I think when Phil raised the same question last week or so I said that the President's feelings towards Bo, as expressed there, are based on having known him for quite a long time and his personal belief in Bo's integrity.

Q Wasn't he commenting on a criminal investigation?

MR. NESSEN: No, he was commenting on his friendship and personal belief in Bo's integrity.

Q The President has said a number of times in the course of the last 19 months that the Atlantic Alliance has been strengthened since he became President. Does he share Secretary Kissinger's reported view that the election of a Communist Government in Western Europe would destroy NATO?

MR. NESSEN: It is stated American policy to oppose Communist Governments in Western Europe. That is publicly stated American policy, so I don't know what exactly the question is.

Q The question is, what does the President think -- if that policy fails and Communist Governments are in fact elected in Western Europe -- the effect on NATO would be? Does he think, as Secretary Kissinger does, that it would destroy the Alliance?

MR. NESSEN: I will take the question and see if I can come up with an answer.

Q Callaway has been reported as saying the President approved of his remarks in advance about Vice President Rockefeller as not being an asset. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not.

Q Can we rely on that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I just simply say that anyone who says that, it is not true.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:10 P.M. EST)