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NEWS CONFERENCE

#477

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:00 NOON EST

APRIL 12, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President is going to be accepting the first of the new \$2 bills from Secretary Simon at 12:30, if he is on time. Do you want to interrupt this briefing for that, or do you want to send a pool in?

O Let's send a pool in.

MR. NESSEN: He said this morning when Simon gives him the \$2 bill he will give Simon two \$1 bills.

O Is it just a picture thing, or does this have wild sound?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is just a picture thing.

Q What is the rationale for that?

MR. NESSEN: For the \$2 bill?

Q Why don't you comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: Okay, I don't have any problem with that.

O How much is a dollar bill worth as a non-inflated dollar?

MR. NESSEN: This is a Bicentennial event.

Q How many have been printed?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will get somebody from Treasury to give you full details of this.

This afternoon at 5:30 the President is going to have a reception for the paid staff of the PFC, plus a large number of volunteers, altogether about 450 people, over in the Residence. We will have pool writer coverage of that. I don't think it is going to be possible to get any TV cameras over there because it is just going to be too many people.

MORE

#477

Q Is he making a speech?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is just going to say a few words of appreciation and thanks, so we will have a writing pool.

Q What is the occasion, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: No special occasion. It is just to thank them for --

Q Are these just Washington volunteers?

MR. NESSEN: Just the ones who work here in headquarters, that is right.

Q And there are 450 people in the PFC headquarters in Washington?

MR. NESSEN: Between the paid and the unpaid. I think some people from the White House staff will be there, too.

Q The cost of the reception is paid by who?

MR. NESSEN: Either the President out of his own pocket, or out of the PFC.

Q Is this one of those \$9 a head parties where you serve cocktails?

MR. NESSEN: If there are cocktails, it is, I think -- what did I say, \$7 to \$9, and if it is only hors d'oeuvres and no drinks, it is \$3 or \$4.

You probably know the Hatch Act amendment is here for the President's signature, and the deadline for action is tomorrow night. He is going to veto it and will read a statement this afternoon announcing his reasons for vetoing it. The earliest that that would take place would be 1:45. It could be later in the afternoon, but that is the earliest it will take place, 1:45.

Q Is that veto number 48?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Where will the statement be read?

MR. NESSEN: In the Oval Office.

Q 48 vetoes?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, 48 vetoes. Number 47 was the child care centers.

Q What is the chief objection?

MR. NESSEN: The statement will explain to you all the objections, but basically it took many years of American history to get the Government worker out from under the abuses that can come when he is subjected to political pressures and so forth, and this is a step backward, the President believes.

Q If we can charter National Airport this week, will the President hold a news conference for us locals over there? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans for a news conference. There is an ASNE Q and A session tomorrow.

Q Can you tell us about that?

MR. NESSEN: If the weather is good -- and it looks like the weather will be good -- it will be on the South Lawn, about 900 people. It will be open for full coverage, and there will be a panel of questioners, but I don't know all their names yet.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: Fivish, that area.

Q How long will the session last?

MR. NESSEN: 20 to 30 minutes, I understand.

Q This is tomorrow night?

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow afternoon, late in the afternoon.

Q What will you do if it rains, Ron, seriously?

MR. NESSEN: It would be moved inside and it would turn into a reception only without any Q and A.

Q Have you expressed to the President our deep concern about the fact that he has almost gotten Mr. Nixon's record insofar as the White House press corps is concerned? I am sure he does not want to do that, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I did not quite put it that way, Les. He understands the interest in having a news conference for members of the Washington White House press corps.

Q He understands it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q That gives us hope, then.

Q Is there a reason why he has not held a regular press conference since February?

MR. NESSEN: He has been having news conferences and interviews all over the country. It just so happens he has not had one here.

Q Ron, is the equal time provision a problem, as far as having one at night, televised and all that?

MR. NESSEN: I am told the FCC has specifically exempted news conferences from equal time requirements.

Q He just doesn't want one, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: His schedule is very crowded with other things, including a lot of press events.

Q Ron, did he have an interview with someone this morning?

MR. NESSEN: He saw Vermont Royster for about a half hour this morning, of the Wall Street Journal.

Q When will we get that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is something Vermont will be sitting down and writing a column about. I think it is something for his own background material, but I did have a transcript made and as soon as I find out when any of the material is going to be used, we will give out the transcript.

Q Ron, a question occurred to me when we were in one of the airports in Texas over the weekend. The back-up planes which carry the President's automobiles and limousines on a trip like this, the flight hours on those -- are they paid for by the PFC or are they paid for by the taxpayer? There were two support planes on one stop, one apparently carrying communication gear and the other carrying limousines.

On that sort of thing, is that part of the President's entourage paid for by the taxpayer or the President Ford Committee?

MR. NESSEN: I believe that is paid for by the Government because it is required by law.

Q Wait a minute, Ron. When did we pass a law saying the President's limousines had to go to a political rally for the President? Now you may have a law saying that wherever the President travels he travels by limousine and by support communications, but you don't have any law that says he has to take that to a political rally in Amarillo, Texas.

MR. NESSEN: There is a law that requires the Secret Service to provide for the safety of the President and certain other people.

Q But to qualify that, don't let us go out of here with a record acting like it is all right by law for the President to go out here and campaign in those cars because the law does not say that.

MR. NESSEN: The law does require that the Secret Service take care of the safety of the President and it is their judgment that the safety of the President requires him to ride in those automobiles.

Q May I pursue it one step further. Assuming there are two logistical backup planes, one flying gear and the other flying limousines, does that not mean that the ultimate cost to the taxpayer of any political trip is more than the cost to the President Ford Committee just by virtue of the fact there are two backup planes going with him on a trip and one 707, being Air Force One?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the cost of the Air Force support is but it is to fulfill legal requirements, one for his safety and I am not, incidentally, aware that there were two planes on this flight, but in any case there are expenses connected with being the President of the United States, wherever he is. They have to do with required communications, required safety with doctors, the normal business of being President.

Q But isn't it possible, though, that on a campaign trip like that, that the expenses incurred by the United States Government legally, in support of the President wherever he goes, are greater than the expenses paid by the President Ford Committee?

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

Q How would I find that out?

MR. NESSEN: I think you could check with the Air Force on the cost of the support plane.

Q Planes.

Q Do you have any figures on how many interviews and other press events he has had, say, in the last year?

MR. NESSEN: Connie Gerrard keeps a running score and she can give it to you.

Q Ron, I am intrigued with the President's answer on The Final Days. He has corroborated the accuracy of some parts relating to himself, apparently, or whatever. How does he know? Did someone give him a fill in? Did Dr. Kissinger, did he read Newsweek excerpts or what?

MR. NESSEN: He has looked at the Newsweek excerpts. I am not sure he had read them in their entirety, but I know he has looked at them.

Q What parts are accurate in his view?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I am not going to expand on what he said the other night, Helen.

Q He has changed his position somewhat from California?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see that myself.

Q You don't know what parts he thinks are accurate and he has not talked to Kissinger about them at all?

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing what they have talked about in their private meetings, Helen.

Q Or with Haig?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Would he be interested in what happened to the President in the final days and why he wasn't told more?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask him, Helen.

Q Ron, has President Ford entertained any suggestion that arms assistance be given to the Peoples Republic of China?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to comment on what may or may not have been discussed internally.

Q Is that a yes?

MR. NESSEN: It is what I said it was. It is an answer to the question.

Q Ron, at the same time that the Congressional Black Caucus was protesting Jimmy Carter's ethnic purity statement, the Justice Department filed an amicus curiae brief contending it is illegal for private schools to exclude pupils because of race. My question is presuming that this is an instance where the President does not disagree with his Justice Department, why does the President believe that private schools should be prohibited from the same racial exclusion as practiced on Capitol Hill by the Congressional Black Caucus who are on the Federal payroll?

MR. NESSEN: Well, that question did not turn out the way I thought it would. I don't know.

Q Could you make an inquiry on that, Ron? The example specifically is Congressman Stark, Fortney Stark of Oakland, tried to get in and was rejected because of his skin pigment and I am just wondering if the President feels that that is justifiable while private schools are not allowed to do the same thing that these Congress people are doing.

MR. NESSEN: I feel sure the President's position would be that the makeup of various Congressional caucuses is not a subject on which he would comment.

Q Ron, let me follow that up, if I could. You mean to say when Congress people, a group of Congressmen on the Hill, exclude a person who wants to join because of his skin, that is all right, but private schools is not?

MR. NESSEN: You know, Les, I remember that we talked about this quite a lot a year or so ago --

Q That was before.

MR. NESSEN: -- the same set of questions and I think I did check for you at that time and I believe the answer, if I am right, was the makeup of Congressional caucuses is not the proper subject for White House comment.

Q Ron, what was Rockefeller doing here today?

MR. NESSEN: You mean his regular meeting with the President?

Q Is this another? He had one last Thursday.

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, this is a regular meeting he had. The day of the week does move from time to time.

Q Ron, has President Ford ever evidenced any interest in checking up on the question of White House files or National Security files being removed by Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure if I understand the question.

Q Is the President aware of the files that Dr. Kissinger and the National Security Council --

MR. NESSEN: Is that the Bill Safire column today? I am told the State Department --

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Fran is curious, I think, about the Bill Safire column today which talks about the alleged removal --

Q Just give us Fran's question, would you kindly?

MR. NESSEN: Fran is asking whether I have any comment on allegations that Dr. Kissinger removed files from the White House and then brought them back later.

Q I asked whether Mr. Ford is looking into that.

MR. NESSEN: And the answer is I am told the State Department will be issuing a statement -- if their briefing is on time it would be in about five minutes or so on the subject matter of the Safire column.

Q Does the President have a position on that?

MR. NESSEN: On what?

Q On the taking of Government files?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think it would be better to wait and see what the State Department statement says.

Q Does the President know what the statement is going to say?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he does not.

Q So it does not necessarily represent him. Just the State Department, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: This is a matter that happened allegedly before the President came to the White House and I don't know what his role in it is. He had no role in it, as far as I can see.

Q I asked, has the President exhibited any concern or looked into this himself, and you are shuffling it over to the State Department.

MR. NESSEN: They are going to make a statement or put out some information at 12:30.

Q Since these papers were removed from the White House, has the White House Counsel made any inquiry into this?

MR. NESSEN: I think you should wait and see what Dr. Kissinger says about the allegations before we move on to any other questions.

Q But you aren't going to tell us what is the President's position, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I don't know how the President could have a position on something that allegedly took place before he ever came to the White House.

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Q Do you know what is going to be said?

MR. NESSEN: I do not.

Q How do you know there is going to be a statement?

MR. NESSEN: I am told just before I came out here that there would be a statement.

Q Why is the State Department issuing a statement on White House papers? The papers were removed from the White House, not the State Department.

MR. NESSEN: You have won the prize here, I guess, from some of your colleagues. These are allegations that appeared in the paper today, Howard, and I think before letting them harden into what seem to be accepted --

Q It was in an accurate book by Woodward and Bernstein.

Q Reasonably accurate.

MR. NESSEN: In any case, it is something that happened before the President came here. If anything that happened or did not happen involved Dr. Kissinger, he is the one that should answer questions about it, and he apparently will.

Q Does the President have any position on ethnic purity?

MR. NESSEN: Ethnic purity?

Q On Federal intervention in neighborhoods to integrate.

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked, Helen.

Q What is the President's position on whether or not Government action should be used to change the ethnic character of a neighborhood?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I did not really ask about that whole subject.

Q Could you please? It seems to be the subject of a great debate on front pages and all over, and he has never been asked that.

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that he has. I can ask him.

Q You do know what we are talking about, what the genesis of this is?

MR. NESSEN: You want him to leap headlong into--

Q No, I do not. I don't begin with ethnic purity. I begin with the President's position on a serious and important matter.

MR. NESSEN: I have not asked him.

Q Specifically, the erection of high rise, low income buildings in suburban areas.

Q That is not just specifically my question. My question is on the record.

Q Could I go back to China just a minute, the question of arms for China. I think your answer was, "I am not going to comment on what may or may not have been discussed internally in the past."

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q That suggestion -- in the past -- can you tell us, is the President now considering the possibility of arms aid to China?

MR. NESSEN: I just changed the verb to the present tense. What is or is not being discussed internally.

Q Has China asked, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to comment on the subject.

Q On China, the other day the President commented about completing the normalization process. Are you prepared to be any more specific on that?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever the choice of words was, the principles of the policy which are in the Shanghai Communique are the same. There has been no change since then. That is still the principle that guides American policy toward the People's Republic.

Q I just wondered if you have any post-trip comments on the Texas expedition? Evans and Novak got another thing out today saying the President is running way behind down there, according to some internal polls. Also, is there anything new on Governor Connally? There are two reports out now. One, he is going to go to the fund-raiser and also he is going to accompany Mrs. Ford on one campaign.

MR. NESSEN: Everybody that I checked with does not know anything about him coming to the fund-raiser and the details of Mrs. Ford's trip to Texas I believe are not far enough along, to my knowledge, to know whether there is any occasion for the Governor to come.

As for an assessment of the trip, it is really difficult to talk about standings. The President feels that he is running behind in Texas, and I think most of the people involved feel he is running behind in Texas. It is going to be hard to judge on election night really because there is no statewide popular vote.

Actually, what you have there is 24 separate little primaries in each of the 25 districts. Some of the districts have large Republican numbers of Republican voters, and some have less than 1,000. Yet, each district will elect four delegates to the convention.

Also, it is not a winner take all in the district. In other words, in some districts you could have the President win three delegates and Reagan win one. So, it is going to be hard to judge how it all comes out. Of course, the object of the thing is to win delegates. That is what the whole primary season has come to now, is to accumulate sufficient delegates to win the nomination.

For instance, Pennsylvania, I think the Republican race there is more or less being ignored because Reagan has chosen not to get into it, but that does not remove the fact that the President will acquire about 100 delegates in Pennsylvania, which will then put him I think somewhere about halfway to accumulating enough delegates to win the nomination.

Q Do you know if the President picked up any endorsements while he was down there that we don't know about?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any, Bob.

Q Ron, the last pool report out of Texas made mention about some concern among Cabinet members on the frequency of Cabinet meetings. Do you know whether or not there is a concern, what kind of concern, how deep is this concern? Is the President's campaigning hampering the running of Government, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of. I never heard any complaint about lack of Cabinet meetings. I did not see that in the pool report.

Q Hartmann said Cabinet members were complaining about lack of Cabinet meetings.

MR. NESSEN: It is new to me.

Q You don't know who has been complaining?

MR. NESSEN: I do not, if anyone.

Q Ron, did he see Lowell Perry this morning or is he seeing him this afternoon about Perry's resignation?

MR. NESSEN: I know of no meeting with Perry today, or I know of no meeting with Perry, period.

Q Will you announce the resignation today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we are going to have an announcement on that today.

Q Ron, you seemed to be prepared to answer the question about the President's views on segregation in private schools. Do you have something on that?

MR. NESSEN: I did not. Where did you get that idea?

Q Les asked the question and then went off in a different direction.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q Could you check and see whether that was a decision that he attended to himself?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q In answering Bob Schieffer's question, you shifted to Pennsylvania. You said he is going to pick up 100 delegates there, and that is no challenge and that will put him close to the half-way mark, which is, as I recall, 1,130 or something like that.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Are you counting all or nearly all of the 117 so-called uncommitted New York delegates? At the last count I think it was 200 some for Ford.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. If you don't count the New York, you get 270 or 250.

Q Are you counting --

MR. NESSEN: I am not doing any delegate counting myself. I am reflecting PFC ideas that those New York delegates hopefully would be for the President.

Q Ron, the Budget Committee is apparently coming up with a budget around \$412 billion and seems to be leaving the President's defense appropriation request pretty much intact. Does the President regard what the budget committees are doing as reasonably in the ballpark of what he would accept?

MR. NESSEN: On the defense budget alone or on the overall budget?

Q What they are coming up with in toto.

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked lately on what his views are on the budget exceeding his \$394, but I will.

Q Ron, Congressman Skip Bafalis of Florida, who I saw campaigning for the President in Fort Lauderdale, has charged, "The State Department's drive to give away the Panama Canal is dormant because 1976 is an election year and no incumbent President wants to go before the voters after taking part in the biggest giveaway in our giveaway-heavy history."

My question is, does the White House regard Congressman Bafalis as misinformed or when does the President intend to speak in detail in support of the State Department plan?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has been asked about the Panama Canal negotiations quite a lot, Les. I can get you a transcript of what he said about it.

Q Does he think Bafalis is misinformed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he has really addressed that question.

Q I wonder if I could raise it because he is a strong supporter of the President and he made this very strong statement that the thing is being laid dormant. The President certainly hasn't introduced it himself, has he? He has answered questions about it, but he has never really featured it. Now, is Bafalis wrong or not?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to comment because I have not seen tCongressman Bafalis' remarks.

Q I will get you a copy so you can check it.

MR. NESSEN: I still won't have any comment on it.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EST)

#477