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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:02 P.M. EDT

MAY 13, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: Just to run you through the schedule this morning, the President had some TV interviews this morning with a chain of TV stations owned by Scripps-Howard called the Scripps-Howard TV stations, separate interviews with the stations in Cleveland, Memphis and Cincinnati.

Most of it was local issues, local highway projects, et cetera, et cetera. Some of them plan to broadcast tonight and some tomorrow, and I guess we will get a transcript out tomorrow.

Q     We don't get any today?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Then, I think you know about the Small Business luncheon speech which is already out, and you have had your briefing on the legislative proposal which is unveiled in that speech, and that is being delivered to the Hill now so that is all done. There will be a travel pool, obviously, to follow the President up there and open press coverage, obviously.

The President will be back here at 2:15.

Then, this evening the President is going to the American Jewish Committee Dinner. That speech is not ready yet and hopefully we will have an advance copy for you by the time he goes.

The President plans to leave here at 8:30 with a travel pool. He would be speaking at about five minutes of 9:00. That is at the Washington Hilton and also open coverage.

Now, for the travels tomorrow and the next two days --

Q     Ron, is that a foreign policy speech tonight?

MR. NESSEN: That speech is in the process of being prepared and I have not seen the latest draft of it.

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Q You indicate the text might be quite late.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, could be. Could be.

Q Ron, the subject would not change from draft to draft, would it? You can tell us if it is foreign policy.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think it will touch on foreign policy, certainly.

Q You don't expect a major Middle East --

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q On the other hand, it is not going to deal with agriculture, for instance, or something like that?

Q Do you think we could get it by 6:00?

Q Ron, what did you say about the major Middle East --

MR. NESSEN: I said no.

Q You do not expect it to be a major Middle East statement?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Well, the President has a meeting with the speech-writers sort of mid-afternoon and it could be that the speech will be approved at that time.

By the end of the day, later afternoon, say, I think we will have the bible for at least the first day of the Kentucky-Tennessee-Michigan trip. That would be the Tennessee and Kentucky day and it would take us up through Flint, Michigan, where we will spend the night tomorrow night.

I think you have already gotten a rundown in a notice to the press on Tuesday of just a rough outline of the events. I do think we will have the bible for tomorrow by late afternoon today.

If you have your suit cases with you, you could leave them in Room 87 of the EOB until 6 o'clock tonight; otherwise, take them out to Andrews with you in the morning. (Laughter)

The show-up out there is 6:30 a.m. and the take-off time is 7:15. The press plane will be going to the Tri-Cities Airport in -- I am not sure which side of the border that is on. Bristol, Tennessee, isn't it? I think it is.

Q What tri-city is that, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: It is Bristol-Kingsport-Johnson City Tri-Cities.

The press plane gets there at 8:20.

The President is going to take off from Andrews in the morning at 7:50 and arrive at the Tri-Cities Airport at 8:55. There is no time change.

I don't think we will have any advance text of the speeches to be given in Johnson City or Memphis, but hopefully during the day tomorrow we will have for you an advance text of the speech to the Louisville Armed Forces Day Dinner. That dinner is some time in the mid-evening, but I think we will put the speech out for 6 o'clock release, if you would like that.

Q Would you expect any of the speeches tomorrow prior to the Louisville speech to break any new ground?

MR. NESSEN: Well, no. (Laughter)

Q Do you expect the Louisville speech to break any new ground?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen that one, actually, Ed, so I don't know what that one is about.

Q What time did you say Ford's takeoff was from Andrews?

MR. NESSEN: 7:50 in the morning.

Q That is early.

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q That is earlier than expected.

MR. NESSEN: Is it? Compared to what?

Q All right. Go ahead.

Q Does that mean that Johnson City and Memphis will be remarks of the routine, the regular stump speech rather than some other subject, some specific subject?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I mean there are going to be prepared remarks, Ted, but we just won't have them out in advance.

Q What are the activities?

MR. NESSEN: Well, in Johnson City, for instance, there is -- wasn't this in the outline?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: It was not?

Q No. The only thing we had were the details on the train plus --

MR. NESSEN: In Johnson City there is a place called the Freedom Hall Civic Center and the President will speak there.

Q Do you expect the PFC receptions to be sandwiched in along the way?

MR. NESSEN: Then there will be a PFC-GOP reception following that.

Q The first one, the Freedom Hall thing, is that a public meeting? Is the public invited?

MR. NESSEN: A public rally, as far as I know, yes.

Then there will be, as I say, a PFC-GOP reception, and then there will be a departure for Memphis.

In Memphis, the President will go to the Mid-America Mall, and that will be a mall-type event. (Laughter)

Q Mall-type -- everybody get mauled. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That takes place at 12:30, 12:35, in that area.

Q Do they use the same rock and roll band at every one of these things, or how does that work? (Laughter)

Q That is the Marine Band in disguise.

MR. NESSEN: Then, there is a PFC reception after that, and then off to Louisville, and then a GOP-PFC reception there, followed by the Armed Forces Day Dinner at which the President will speak. Then the President will speak at about 7:35 in Louisville.

Then, we will take off from Louisville at about 8:15, arriving in Flint at about 9:15, and there are no further events for the day once we arrive in Flint.

Q Ron, will Senators Baker and Brock be traveling with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Those are tentative times, incidentally. Let me just make sure.

Yes, in fact, they are very tentative times because I was reading from a two-day-old version of the schedule so be careful.

Q Where does he arrive at in Flint? Flint Metropolitan Airport?

MR. NESSEN: Bishop Field, Flint, Michigan.

Q Ron, will Baker and Brock be with the President in the two stops in Tennessee?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, and Congressman Quillen, too, I believe.

All right. So that is it for the weekend. A lot of Michigan things are still being firmed up and put together so we will do it as we go along. The train trip is on for Saturday.

Q Do you have any thoughts about a return on Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: No, but I think it might be later than I had originally thought. It might be toward the evening.

Q Does he have any plans here on Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Is he campaigning in Maryland? Maybe you have spoken on that.

MR. NESSEN: Maybe there is something after he gets back. It is hard to keep up.

One time there was some thought about making a campaign stop in Maryland. I don't know where that stands now.

MR. CARLSON: As far as I know, there is none scheduled right now.

MR. NESSEN: There is none scheduled right now. It would have to be on before Tuesday, wouldn't it?

Q Ron, does the schedule still show a California trip next week or points West?

MR. NESSEN: There is some thought being given to a trip West, but nothing is firm.

Q Could we expect travel every weekend until June 8?

MR. NESSEN: I would, yes. (Laughter)

Q Ron, I apologize for being tardy, but did you say that there is no way that we can get an advance of this before the evening news broadcast tonight?

MR. NESSEN: Of the Jewish speech?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think it is possible, depending on how much more work the speech needs after the President takes a look at it later today.

Q If we get it earlier, would it be for 6:30 release, then?

MR. NESSEN: I think we can do that, yes.

Q Six o'clock?

MR. NESSEN: Six o'clock.

Q Has he told you anything about the way he felt after what he saw in Michigan yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President thought the crowds were large and warm and --

Q At the beginning or the end?

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q At the beginning or the end?

MR. NESSEN: Throughout the day.

Q The speech, I am sorry.

MR. NESSEN: The President does expect to win in Michigan and really was quite enthusiastic about the kind of reception he received in Michigan.

Q Ron, regarding Mr. Morton's statement about the Titanic and that the President has got to win in Michigan to be a viable candidate and also the President in the past has made frequent statements that it is conceivable that Mr. Reagan might be his running mate, what if the President loses in Michigan and Kansas City? Does he think it conceivable that he might be Mr. Reagan's running mate?

MR. NESSEN: The President does not expect to lose in Michigan and does not expect to lose in Kansas City.

Q To follow that up, do you know what the President's reaction was to that AP photograph showing a rather disconsolate Morton in front of all those empty liquor bottles?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what his reaction was, Les.

Q Does the President have any private polls from Michigan?

Q He didn't drink all that himself, did he?  
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q He didn't drink all that whiskey himself, did he?

MR. NESSEN: I was not there.

Q Ron, do you have anything to say about the story --

Q Let's discuss this whiskey for a moment.  
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I didn't think you would let that slip on by, Jim.

Q Who emptied them bottles?

MR. NESSEN: I guess it was most of the reporters who spent primary night over at the headquarters, as far as I know.

Q Blame it all on the press. (Laughter)

Q That is right, blame it all on the press.

Q Ron, was that photo taken at the time of the Titanic statement?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea, Russ.

Q Ron, could I ask you a serious question?

MR. NESSEN: These are serious questions, I thought.

Q Do you have anything to say about the story in the Times this morning about the Russians and Jimmy Carter and the allegations that treaties are being held up for political purposes?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, you have got a couple of stories there rolled into one question. As far as the story that has to do with suggestions that Carter or his people are meeting with the Russians, I don't know anything about it.

The other part of it, I think, goes to the question of whether the peaceful nuclear threshold treaty is somehow not being signed for political purposes, and I think I answered that last night on Air Force One.

Q Could you elaborate?

MR. NESSEN: It is certainly not true.

Q Let me take that a little further. Last night you said it was a matter essentially of paperwork on our end. Now there is a report this morning -- I cannot say whether it is correct or not but it sounded correct in the sense that it was not a dope story or anything -- that the Russians had had a ceremony scheduled for the signing and it was all set and that ceremony was suddenly called off.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what, if anything, the Russians had planned. Let me just say that all these questions and a couple of the stories I have seen are based somehow on the assumption or start from the premise that there is something embarrassing about this treaty or damaging about this treaty. Quite the opposite. The President is quite proud of this treaty.

The treaty arrived here about midnight last night, incidentally, and I will tell you how it got here, if you are interested.

If the treaty had come at midnight last night and we had had the whole White House and State Department full of people working all night long to get a signing ceremony late on, I am sure we would have seen stories today saying that the President rushed the signing of this treaty for political gain in Michigan.

Q Well, if it had been politically advantageous, wouldn't you have done that? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Well, the answer is that whatever the timetable for signing the treaty, Walt, has nothing to do with politics or the Michigan primary. The fact is that the President is very proud of the treaty. It is an advantageous treaty, so some of the stories I have seen, I think, really start off with the false assumption.

The treaty did arrive here last -- well, first of all --

Q Tell us how it arrived, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The treaty, as you know, has been negotiated over a number of years and the major provisions of it were announced on April 9 so, you know, any suggestion that this would be some new and dramatic U.S.-Russian agreement is silly because it has been announced since April 9.

It does contain a provision which the United States, for I think as far back as the Eisenhower Administration and maybe longer, has been trying to get from the Russians, which is on-site inspection on Russian territory. So that would certainly be one of the provisions which the President is happy with.

Anyhow, as you know, we announced here on the 9th of April that the negotiators had completed their work on the treaty, that it would be reviewed by the governments, and it was.

The principal U.S. negotiator, Ambassador Stoessel, initialed it yesterday in Moscow and the First Deputy Chairman of the State Committee for Utilization of Atomic Energy on the Russian side, Mr. Igor Morokhov, signed it on the Russian side. It was then put on an airplane -- namely, Air Flight Number 311 -- flown to New York, where it was taken over to the Embassy at about 10 o'clock last night, further flown to Washington, and arrived at about midnight last night, taken into the State Department --

Q Which embassy? You said it was taken to an embassy in New York.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, the American Mission in New York.

Q The UN Mission?

MR. NESSEN: The U.S. Mission to the UN, yes.

It was brought down here about midnight and then delivered to the State Department's office this morning at about 9:30. So, when all the necessary preparations and printing and so forth are done, it will be signed.

Q Well, accepting your premise that there is no political problem with the delay here, is there an overall pattern here that foreign policy has been put on the back burner during the campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has said no.

Q Well, the reason I asked --

MR. NESSEN: It can't be, for one thing.

Q Well, the reason I ask is because all last year the President, when talking of the Middle East, said, "We cannot afford a stalemate there. A stalemate will lead to further and more war," and that that would be, you know -- it was intolerable and yet we have had no movement in the Middle East at all or no perceptible movement. That is why I again raise the question.

Has foreign policy been put on the back burner?  
Don't we have a dangerous stalemate in the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: Well, to separate the two questions, no, foreign policy has not been put on the back burner because of the campaign -- it can't be -- and the President has said that. And, secondly, the situation in the Middle East, whatever progress or attempts at progress are being made, are being made unrelated to American politics.

Q Well, does the President believe that the Middle East has degenerated into a stalemate, the kind he warned about?

MR. NESSEN: I would have to get myself briefed up on the subject, Walt.

Q What is the President's reaction to the report that 15 members of the New York Republican delegation are about to go over and announce for Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I said before, the column that is called "uncommitted" does not adequately express how the various State delegates will vote on the first ballot in Kansas City.

Q Well, is he upset about this? Has he discussed it with Vice President Rockefeller?

MR. NESSEN: Vice President Rockefeller is in Europe right now. I think probably the PFC will be the proper people to tell you how many of the delegates that are called uncommitted will actually vote for the President on the first ballot.

Q Does the White House have a reaction to the second part of Dave's question on the question of the Soviet signing ceremony?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know anything about it.

Q Wouldn't you know if there had been a ceremony scheduled in the Kremlin to sign this thing and it was suddenly called off?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I, myself, wouldn't. I know that it has never been on any schedule that we have had here.

Q Was it planned to have this a simultaneous thing or was he going to sign it just when they were ready to sign it? Was there anything simultaneous?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure, Jim. I know it has never been on the schedule for this week here.

Q Could you find out?

Q Are these preparations going to be completed shortly after the Michigan primary? I mean, how long is it going to take to do all of this?

MR. NESSEN: Well, whenever the signing takes place, the timing of it will be unrelated to any political primary schedule.

Q Let's ask it this way: Do you anticipate a U.S. signing this week?

MR. NESSEN: I anticipate a U.S. signing as soon as all the necessary preparatory steps have been taken.

Q Well, how long do you estimate that is going to take?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Going back to Walt's question on foreign policy on the back burner, is the quietness of the negotiating situation in Panama now, the pace of negotiation in Panama now, totally unrelated to the fact that we are having an election this year?

MR. NESSEN: What qualifiers and adjectives did you put on the pace of negotiations?

Q Quietness.

Q The pace. Just the pace.

MR. NESSEN: Well, the negotiations going on have nothing to do with American politics and vice versa.

Q The pace of the negotiation.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the pace is. You will have to ask the State Department what the pace is. I am just saying that the two are not related.

Q What was the President's reaction to this committee's decision or request for additional ships?

MR. NESSEN: Well, he is sorry, really, that the committee itself has done this. He is disappointed in that, but there are a number of legislative steps to go and that he hopes that as it moves through that the funds that he asked for will be added or included in the bill.

Q Has the President taken any interest in the scandals at West Point that were in the New York Times and then there was another West Point legal officer who has been transferred quite unexpectedly because of the rumored cheating scandal?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard him talk about it. I will have to check on it.

Q Would you, because he is Commander-in-Chief.

MR. NESSEN: I know that.

Q Ron, does the White House have any reaction to this new compromise natural gas deregulation bill that was introduced yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we would like to take a look at it. We have not seen it actually enough to analyze it. The President's position has been that the deregulation will make a much greater supply of natural gas available and reduce the shortages and also will reduce the need for people to convert from natural gas to expensive imported oil, but as for the specific bill, we have not seen it enough to look at it yet.

Q Ron, I didn't understand your answer on whether he will campaign in Maryland, and also, has the President analyzed why he was defeated in Nebraska or any of the reasons that might have been the cause -- you know, prominent?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, Helen, there is nothing scheduled in Maryland and I don't know of anything that is.

On the analysis of Nebraska, I think you would have to ask over at the PFC on that.

Q Ron, would the President have any objections if Jimmy Carter or any other candidate for President held an exchange of views, conversations, with the Russians?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, Dick. I don't know the answer to that.

Q When you are checking, would you ask somebody -- find a functionary and ask them whether there is any consideration of the Logan Act in such contacts?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Ron, I would like to go back to Panama, if I might, for a minute.

Secretary Kissinger has an interview in the Hearst newspapers this morning in which he says that Ronald Reagan's course with respect to Panama would, if followed, be disastrous. Further, he is to go before a committee this morning on the Hill and is expected to have some further critical things to say, according to various stories, about Reagan's suggestions proposed in the area of foreign policy, and it also says in the Hearst interview that he would resign if the President asked him to.

Now, on the Reagan part of all this stuff, were these things discussed with the President? I don't know how they could have been, but were they anyway, before he gave the interview and discussed his testimony with the President beforehand?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to either one of those questions.

Q Has the Secretary offered to quit?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he hasn't.

Q Well, he says he has in the first interview -- well, he says he would resign if the President asked him to.

MR. NESSEN: I think the President is asked about this every day and answers it every day, Dick. I don't think you need another reiteration from me.

Q There is no change?

MR. NESSEN: No change in the situation.

Q To follow that up, Ron, in view of the Secretary's pledge that the Ford Administration will support the Byrd Amendment, has the President, since that statement, mentioned the Byrd Amendment, and does he plan to at any time in the foreseeable future?

MR. NESSEN: Would you repeat the question?

Q All right.

Secretary Kissinger, as you know, pledged that the Ford Administration would campaign to get Congress to repeal the Byrd Amendment.

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that is what he said, but go ahead.

Q Well, okay. Well, I am almost certain that is what he did say, Ron.

Now the question is, has the President said anything about repealing the Byrd Amendment, and does he intend to in the near future?

MR. NESSEN: The Administration's position, as far as I can remember, has been in favor of repealing the Byrd Amendment.

Q I know that. That is not my question. My question is, is the President going to implement what the Secretary of State pledged to the Africans, or at least part of the Africans? Is he, or is he not? I just want to know. Has he said anything about it or is this another silent thing?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know what you mean by saying anything about it, Les. Secretary Kissinger was enunciating the President's foreign policy which is in favor of repealing the Byrd Amendment.

Q Right, but certainly if the President takes this seriously and it is an important thing, certainly the President would explain to the public why he wants this, wouldn't he, or not?

MR. NESSEN: I think, as we have said here over the past week or so, the exact mechanism for accomplishing that aim has not been decided upon yet.

Q I see. Okay.

Q Ron, does the President have a new post in mind for the Chief of Protocol Catto?

MR. NESSEN: I think Chief of Protocol Catto has a post already, doesn't he?

Q He has a new post in mind for him as another Ambassador assignment?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard that.

Q Why didn't we get an announcement today on that third Republican member of the FEC? I thought we were supposed to get it at this briefing.

MR. NESSEN: I think we will get it fairly soon but I don't have it for you now.

Q Will it be today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Will you put that out on the road on the Kentucky-Tennessee trip, or what are you talking about?

MR. NESSEN: The President will make the nominations soon.

Q Is it going to be Marlow Cook as Chairman?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we will just wait and see who it is he nominates.

Q It is, huh? (Laughter)

Q Ron, a couple of times yesterday the President said Michigan was the primary he had to win. Now, was there an implied "or else" in that statement?

MR. NESSEN: No, he expects to win it.

Q He said he had to win it.

MR. NESSEN: Well, he expects to.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:28 P.M. EDT)

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