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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:10 P.M. EDT

JUNE 4, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: Some of you have heard the President's own reaction to today's economic statistics, so I won't bother with that.

I think you have seen the meeting with Governor Scranton on the schedule for this afternoon at 4:00. That has to do with discussion with the President in advance of Ambassador Scranton's trip to Africa, which lasts from June 12 to July 2. That will be the subject of that meeting.

We either have or will hand out a summary schedule of the President's trip to Ohio.

Q How about New Jersey?

MR. NESSEN: And New Jersey.

Just so you can make some general plans, the press check-in on Sunday morning is at 10:00 a.m. and the press plane will leave at 10:30. The President will depart from Andrews at 11:30 and will arrive at the Newark International Airport in Newark, New Jersey at 12:15.

Q Where is the first landing?

MR. NESSEN: At Newark. These will be ready after the briefing.

Q Ron, before you go on, can I ask a question about Governor Scranton's trip to Africa? Have you announced the itinerary of what countries he will visit?

MR. NESSEN: The State Department, I think, has it. It is a fairly lengthy list of countries. He will be gone about three weeks.

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Q Is he going to South Africa?

MR. NESSEN: Sierra Leone, Senegal, Upper Volta, Gabon, Central African Republic, Tanzania, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, Cameroon and the Ivory Coast.

Q Why is he going?

MR. NESSEN: In Abidjan he will lead the U.S. delegation to the International Conference.

Back to the trip. The outlook for the bible is tomorrow afternoon, and the outlook for the speech -- I would say the only speech we are going to be putting a text out on is the Sunday night speech in Cleveland to the Conference of Christian and Jews. His text of it could very well come as late as sometime during the day on Sunday. I realize your problems with Monday a.m. stories, and we will get it out as fast as we can.

Q And you will have transcripts of Face the Nation on the airplane going out?

MR. NESSEN: They will be here at the White House in the afternoon.

Q When can we expect it?

MR. NESSEN: The taping is not until noon. It will be over at 12:30, so say around 3:00.

Q Ron, what is the release time for that speech in Cleveland?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will put it out for Monday a.m.'s, 6:00 p.m. Sunday night.

Q What about Face the Nation?

MR. NESSEN: That is CBS's call and -- isn't that shown at 11:30?

Q 11:30.

MR. NESSEN: So, it would be for 11:30 a.m. release.

Q But the White House will have the transcripts of Face the Nation, we don't have to go to CBS?

MR. NESSEN: To ease your lives, we are planning to put out a transcript of Face the Nation.

Q Ron, you say they will be here tomorrow afternoon. Will they also be on the plane?

MR. NESSEN: They will also be abundantly on the press plane and on Air Force One for the pool.

That is the weekend trip, and there will be a travel pool going over tomorrow to CBS for the Face the Nation show. The President will leave here about 11:35 and will return about 12:35.

Q Has that been expanded to a full hour or is that just a 30-minute interview?

MR. NESSEN: Thirty minutes.

Q Will tapes be available?

MR. NESSEN: That is something you have to take up with CBS.

I don't have any other thoughts about tomorrow's schedule other than for guidance the President hopes to be able to get out and play a little golf tomorrow, hopefully staying out of the woods.

Looking ahead to next week, two things that you might be interested in, the President has invited the President of Botswana, President Seretse Khama, to visit the White House Wednesday at 11:00. President Khama is in the United States on a private visit following a stop in the United Kingdom.

Then the next day, on Thursday, the President is going to meet with President Jaafar Nimeiri of Sudan. President Nimeiri is also on a private visit to the United States, during which he will travel to a number of States. He is taking the opportunity of this private visit to meet with the President.

Q Ron, at any of these meetings, are they tied in with the President's Southern African initiative or just more of the -- will he be talking about that or is it just coincidence?

MR. NESSEN: In the case of Botswana, as you may know, the United States believes that Botswana, which is in Southern Africa, is making considerable progress in developing a multiracial society. The United States is pledged to help Botswana with its development. The United States also feels that President Khama and his Government have played a constructive role in the efforts to find a negotiated settlement for the problems of Southern Africa, so I suppose the short answer to your question would be yes, I would expect the problems of Southern Africa to be discussed at the meeting.

Q Ron, while we are on this subject, you indicated right after Kissinger got back from the African trip that meetings would be held to determine strategy regarding how to proceed on the Byrd amendment. It has been a week or two now. Can we assume that since you have not sent up a bill or special message on the subject you are not going to?

MR. NESSEN: I continue to be unable to understand the asking of that question because the President is on record as saying that his Administration favors the repeal of the Byrd amendment. Secretary Kissinger who is the spokesman for President Ford's foreign policy, has testified more than once at Congressional hearings to that effect, that the United States, the Ford Administration favors the repeal of the Byrd Amendment.

Now, there is legislation there to repeal the Byrd amendment. It does not have to originate here. It is there, and under consideration, and President Ford's spokesmen on foreign policy have gone there and testified in favor of a repeal so, as I say, I don't understand the question. There should be no doubt with the President's stands.

Q It is a matter of degree of support, as you know, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: If the Secretary of State goes and testifies for repeal and the President publicly speaks out and urges repeal, I don't know what higher degree of support you can ask for.

Q Ron, there is a Reuters story with a Brussels dateline, so I assume it is a NATO source's, that the Soviet Union has moved 70 war ships into the Eastern Mediterranean off Lebanon. The standard complement for the Soviet Navy in the entire Mediterranean is about 55 ships, so they are increasing their seapower in that part of the world. Does the President view this with alarm in view of the worsening crisis in Lebanon?

MR. NESSEN: First of all, I have to listen to the reports and see if there is anything to them, Walt.

Q I tried to call the Pentagon, but they did not call back, but it is a Reuters story.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen that report, but I will look it up.

Q Will I get an answer today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, at yesterday's Kissinger-Simon briefing, someone -- I think Phil Jones -- asked the question, what is the estimated cost of this allegedly nonpolitical economic summit meeting in Puerto Rico and when nobody knew, he asked if it could be determined. What is the estimated cost?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the estimated cost, but I am told that others who have a very similar question are being directed to Alan Greenspan, who may be able to provide some answers.

Q Is the Secretary of State meeting with the South African Premier at the behest of President Ford?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if I would use the word "behest," Helen. It is in furtherance of the President's policy that consultations go forward with all the Governments and leaders in that area looking towards a peaceful settlement of the problems in Southern Africa, so yes, it is part of the President's policy that this meeting is going to take place.

Q Ron, are there plans for a meeting between the President and Mr. Vorster?

MR. NESSEN: There aren't any plans for one now, Dick, but as I think the President said publicly on two or three occasions, if in the future it appeared that such a meeting would help with this process, he would certainly consider it.

Q My question is, the point is that he is a head of State and the President has said he would like to meet with the South African. Is this a planning meeting, preparatory meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No, I would not call it a preparatory meeting for any meeting between the President and Vorster.

Q Ron, is there any active consideration being given to a trip to the Middle East before the election?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not that I know of.

Q Specifically, are plans underway, as widely reported, for a reconvening of a Geneva Conference in September?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly don't know of any, and I have looked into the matter.

Q Are you in a position to flatly rule this out?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I have looked into the matter, Jim, and there are no such plans as far as I can determine, so I think that is a pretty flat statement.

Q In view of this latest Field Poll in California, does the President still think he has a chance to win out there?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President told some reporters this morning who asked him about that that the information he has received -- well, he does not know when the Field Poll was taken, and I don't, either.--

Q It was taken this week.

MR. NESSEN: -- or what it consisted of, but its findings as reported don't jibe with the kind of reports he is getting firsthand from people who are running the phone banks for his campaign and others who are involved in his campaign. He has heard nothing directly that changes his publicly stated position, which is he is closing the gap, he has some momentum going and that he is hopeful of winning next Tuesday.

Q Early on in the primary season, when the President was the favorite, Reagan or his staff would consistently say "45 percent we would like upon as a victory," or 40 percent. Would the President look upon a showing of 45 percent or something less than 50 as a victory?

MR. NESSEN: We have not played the numbers game in any State, and I am not going to start now.

Q Ron, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, does the President feel the West Point honor code should be revised so cadets should tolerate cheaters, liars and thieves, or should the honor code be maintained as it is?

MR. NESSEN: The President believes the honor code should be maintained as it is. He will be interested in seeing what Secretary Hoffman's inquiry into the matter turns up, but at the moment he favors a continuation of the honor code.

Q Ron, to your knowledge, is there any friction between the Ford Administration appointees and people left over in sensitive Government posts from the Nixon Administration?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what brings that on, but I have a feeling I will soon find out, but I don't know of any.

Q Ron, going back to Lebanon, does the President plan any new American initiatives concerning the Lebanese crisis?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't know what you mean "new American initiative." We have our Ambassador there who has tried to be helpful to the parties involved, and we believe it should be settled on a political basis by the Lebanese of all persuasions of themselves.

Q Do you have any meetings planned with Russian or Syrian officials?

MR. NESSEN: Here in Washington?

Q Any place.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely the day-by-day mechanism that is being pursued by the American Ambassador in Beirut, but we have stated publicly before he is helping and is in contact with the various parties involved.

Q Can you give us the latest update on the President's analysis of the crisis?

MR. NESSEN: I just did not talk to him about it today.

Q Do you have a progress report on the busing legislation preparation, when you expect it to go to Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything beyond what I said yesterday.

Q Do you expect anything before Tuesday?

MR. NESSEN: I can see what is coming ahead. I just don't have a timetable.

Q Ron, I thought I read you saying two or three weeks. Is my memory wrong on that?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is. The President said as soon as possible, and I was unable to translate that into days.

Q Would you rule out Monday?

MR. NESSEN: Muriel, if you suggest that it has anything to do with Tuesday's voting, it has nothing to do with Tuesday's voting. It has to do with getting the legislation drafted in the form the President wants and taking these various soundings that he has promised to take before sending it up.

Q Regarding the military academy, does the President favor the extension to the Naval Academy, which revised the honor codes under Admiral Calvert several years ago?

MR. NESSEN: I did not ask him about the Naval Academy.

Q Do you have any further thinking on why he believes it should be maintained?

MR. NESSEN: He believes it is a code that has produced some great leaders -- not just in the military field, but in broader fields -- and until Secretary Hoffman looks further into it and perhaps has some ideas or suggestions for changing it, he believes it has served to produce a distinguished corps of graduates and he does not see any reason to change it.

Q Earlier this week in one of his interviews-- I think an Ohio interview--the President indicated he might favor something called a national council to help negotiate with school boards desegregation plans. Is that what he has asked Secretary Mathews to come up with?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is more the other way around, Walt, that that is among the -- or something like that is among the suggestions that Secretary Mathews has presented to the President, which are now in the process of being reviewed and refined and modified and so forth.

Q And the President finds this acceptable?

MR. NESSEN: It is one of the Mathews ideas that is under consideration.

Q Ron, since the President is the one that sets foreign policy, why does he permit Mr. Eagleburger to continue trying to put Turner Shelton into these plush places when he didn't allow people to use his Ambassador's residence during the earthquake, and now he wants his car flown into Casablanca, wants the thing remodeled and so forth, and the Consular Associate has protested this -- why does the President allow this continuing, trying to foist this guy into a plush position?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the latest developments in the Turner Shelton case.

Q Ron, you indicated the President is going to take soundings from civil rights leaders on this busing legislation. Does that mean that he has decided to grant the request for meeting with Roy Wilkins?

MR. NESSEN: He indicated yesterday that -- the President does want to hear from Members of Congress, civil rights leaders, constitutional experts, State leaders, city leaders and so forth, but the forum for getting those views, Dave, and precisely the people they would come from has not been decided yet.

Q But if you want all of these people to give you their input on this legislation, you obviously then are planning some kind of a conference or a meeting.

MR. NESSEN: I say the format for getting those views has not been decided on yet.

Q You are not going to poll all those people one at a time in the Oval Office, you are obviously going to have a meeting.

MR. NESSEN: That is what has not been decided yet, how to do it.

Q Ron, is this going to happen before -- what is the timetable for this --

MR. NESSEN: He wants to hear these views before going forward with his proposals.

Q When do you think this will be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: As soon as possible.

Q Ron, has the President ordered any investigation of any sort into what appears to be a burgeoning scandal at the FEA involving the alleged forgery of some documents?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, Frank Zarb is handling that matter at the moment.

Q We are getting a lot of queries from convention States, if we have a finale on the primary campaigning. Is the President considering several trips or what?

MR. NESSEN: He is considering whether to travel to convention States and, if so, which ones and it is has not really gone beyond that at the moment.

Q Do you have a copy of this proposal on the Federal council that Secretary Mathews has proposed to the President be used into avoiding busing crises? Do you have a copy of that? HEW won't give it to you because it was a recommendation Mathews made to the President?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q And it is figured here he talks considerably and it seems to me it is not a secret plan. There should be something that you all certainly could let us have.

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, as we discussed the other day, historically a Cabinet member or any other advisers recommendations and discussions with the President I think properly should not be made public until the President has made his choices. Otherwise, officials would be inhibited from giving honest and candid advice to the President. That is well established.

Q At what point does the President think we should be brought in on the dialogue, after the decision is made?

MR. NESSEN: Everything I read indicates that it is a fairly public dialogue on this issue.

Q Is there some kind of declassification of Government documents to be announced today here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of it.

Q A governmental committee on declassification that is supposed to give its annual report today.

MR. NESSEN: We will find out about that.

Q Does the President or do you have any comments on the burgeoning Wayne Hays-Elizabeth Ray scandal and various ramifications thereof?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has indicated that that is a matter that Congress should deal with.

Q Apparently a couple of years ago -- two or three years ago -- he argued against increasing the power of that committee saying the Congress, the House, would never get that power back unless some kind of scandal occurred.

Does the President sort of feel now that he told them he gave them warning and that he is right. Do you know what I am talking about?

MR. NESSEN: I do. The President asked to have a copy of that pulled out of the files to see what he did say.

Q You have not heard him say, "I warned them back in 1973"?

MR. NESSEN: That is why he wanted to read it.

Q It has already been made public on the floor of the Congress, so I don't see why you can't talk about it openly.

Q Does the President feel he is a prophet as Michel said, on matters of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is not claiming to be a prophet.

Q Does the President feel the Democrats have their own Watergate going in the Elizabeth Ray scandal?

MR. NESSEN: It is just not something the President is going to comment on, Jim.

Q Ron, why, because the President is a moral leader. This is something certainly everyone on the Hill has commented on. Certainly a great many leaders on the Hill. Is it not possible that people might get the idea the President is trying just to avoid this or doesn't care? Undoubtedly he must care. Mrs. Ford has commented. Why doesn't the President?

MR. NESSEN: Let me make a couple of points. One, I am told that Mrs. Ford has told the President she did not say what she was quoted as saying, but that is something aside.

Q What was that, Ron? Let's get it straight so we won't go outside and make a little inaccuracy here in reporting what she was quoted as saying.

MR. NESSEN: Somebody -- maybe it was you, Les -- read me that quote the other day.

Q That was from a wire service, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Which wire service was it?

Q I read it in the Washington Post.

Q Ron, I checked on that. Mrs. Ford was quoted as saying Wayne Hays was a fine gentleman, but when I called her office to check this, Mrs. Ford could not remember having said that but was not sure that she had not said it according to Mrs. Weidenfeld.

Now, are you telling us she told the President she did not say it?

MR. NESSEN: What she told the President, I think, is probably what Sheila told you, that she did not remember saying anything like that.

Q Sheila said Mrs. Ford could not remember whether she had said that or not, she might have, but she also added that she had said that at other times that Mr. Wayne Hays' problem was his problem. She also said she did not know Mr. Wayne Hays. Now will you clear this up for us?

Q There was another thing she said, he was not married when it happened. That was another quote. That is a wire service.

Q She said he was single at the time it happened.

MR. NESSEN: All I know -- you will have to check with Sheila on what Mrs. Ford said.

Q I did. I just told you what I got.

MR. NESSEN: Then I am certainly not going to --

Q But you are coming here and saying something different.

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you what the President indicated to me Mrs. Ford had said to him which is she told the President she did not recall saying that.

Q Which is the quote she does not recall having said?

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you what the President told me, Sarah.

Q Which quote was it? There were three different quotes.

MR. NESSEN: I think I will go to the more substantive question which Les asked which is why won't the President comment.

Q I am asking you my question on Mrs. Ford. We have a right, Ron, before you go saying Mrs. Ford told the President, and the President told you she did not say this, we have a right to know what the quote is that she did not say.

MR. NESSEN: Well, the quote that she told the President she did not say is the quote Les gave me the other day that was reported in the Washington Post from one of the wire services.

Q The one about Wayne Hays being a fine gentleman?

MR. NESSEN: Which one was it, Les?

Q I want to confess, Ron, it might have been the Washington Star but I thought this was an intriguing thing because she said, "He is a very fine gentleman and he was not married when it happened."

Q Now she says she doesn't know Mr. Wayne Hays so how did she know he wasn't married when it happened?

MR. NESSEN: Anyhow, to the more substantive question that Les asked which is why won't the President comment. The fact is the matter that has come up here is being investigated, I understand, by both the mechanism in Congress and by the Justice Department and because of that the President feels it really is not proper to make any further comment on it.

Q Did you get the answer to my question the other day that you said you would take up with the President, whether he thought we should have a moral code for bureaucrats in the Executive Branch?

MR. NESSEN: The President feels when he first came to the White House that he indicated to all the people in the Administration that he expected them to follow a high standard of morals and ethics and that he feels he himself has set the example and that he does not know of any case in the Administration in which the officials who work for him have not followed that advisory.

Q Ron, just to follow the burgeoning case of Wayne Hays, does the President have any evidence of or copies of the letters that Mr. Johnson's successor allegedly wrote to a diplomat's wife while he was in the White House and can you tell us if they also are stored in the Executive Office Building?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't any idea.

Q Is the President familiar with this story that has now been published, burgeoning story?

MR. NESSEN: He may have read it in the course of reading the newspapers.

Q Has any effort been made or will any effort be made to see if there are any copies of these alleged letters in the files of the White House or the government anywhere?

MR. NESSEN: I know of no efforts.

Q Ron, the President talked this morning about inflation, how well things are going. To your knowledge has he been warned about a possible sharp increase in inflation in '77?

MR. NESSEN: Well, his economic advisors periodically bring him up to date on the current state of the economy and the projected state of the economy and I think he has indicated on a number of occasions that with the proper restraint by Congress that there would not be a revival of inflation in 1977.

Q Do the President or his advisors, Ron, believe that there is any possibility of an inventory inflation without any role here by the Congress, without any role for Congressional spending? In other words, do they think there is a possibility of renewed inflation even if Congress goes along with his fiscal restraints?

MR. NESSEN: I just have not gotten into the matter in that depth, Jim. I think if you call Bill Seidman or Alan Greenspan they can help you.

Q This week prior to the California, Ohio and New Jersey primaries you have been kind enough to make the President readily available to us on an almost daily basis. Will you continue to do this after next Tuesday?

MR. NESSEN: I think that this pre-dates the immediate period that we are in now, Walt.

Q There was the suggestion at the Texas seminar that you went to that the President be available to see reporters on a 15 minute basis daily and you said you would check on it. Did you ever broach that subject to him?

MR. NESSEN: Not as a specific proposal.

Q Are you going to?

MR. NESSEN: My own feeling is that the President is extraordinarily accessible both here in the White House and when he travels. We have a log of the amount of time he spends in interviews, news conferences and editorial board meetings, and that kind of thing, and I would not be surprised if you averaged that, you would probably find he has spent over the 22 months or so, probably an average of better than 15 minutes a day with reporters. I think -- I would just guess that that might be true.

Q By my reckoning there was a period a few weeks ago when we were screaming for news conferences because he was about to break Nixon's record for not meeting with the White House press regularly.

MR. NESSEN: But that is a different thing, Walt. Then during the same period you are talking about when he had a lot of interviews and he was accessible at every airport where we landed. I remember one time Helen sort of walked him to his limousine at one airport because she needed some further elaboration of the Peaceful Nuclear Energy Treaty.

Q That is because you weren't there to cut us off at the pass.

Q Ron, there are more holes in what you just said than a piece of swiss cheese. Most of these meetings you have been talking about have been with reporters or editors from States in which a primary was about to be held. They dealt with political matters almost exclusively, the political outlook most particularly in that State. A general news conference with White House reporters has not been held by the President of the United States since February.

MR. NESSEN: Wait a second. I thought there was one last week.

Q There was one in Columbus, Ohio, but I am talking about a full scale press conference here in Washington.

MR. NESSEN: Why, don't you feel your colleagues who happen to work in another city are equally qualified to ask questions?

Q That's baloney.

Q That is below the belt.

MR. NESSEN: You know, there are reporters here from Ohio who had an opportunity to talk to the President this morning and I don't think they would feel --

Q I will concede the point the President has now held --

MR. NESSEN: You said they were baloney and I don't believe they are baloney. I think they probably have a pretty fair idea of what the radio listeners in Ohio want. In fact, one man brought in a list of questions he had taken down over the phone from his listeners. I don't see there is anything wrong with reporters from Ohio asking the President questions.

Q We are asking for news conferences in Washington on a regular basis and we don't see why that can't be held.

MR. NESSEN: You know the President has a very good record of meeting reporters and I know we will have news conferences.

Q Will this continue after Tuesday?

MR. NESSEN: It started the day he came here, Walt, and I expect it to keep up until the day he goes.

Q Whatever happened to that idea you were talking about the other night, the fund raiser?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Is he going to go to the Southern Baptist Convention?

MR. NESSEN: When is that?

Q The 15th or the 17th, and they are expecting him, Ron, except there is some opposition to his coming.

MR. NESSEN: I will check and see. I don't know that.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:40 P.M. EDT)