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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#520

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:45 A.M. EDT

JUNE 21, 1976

MONDAY

Q Ron, what is this Congressional meeting about, and will we have a chance to ask questions when it is over?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is a discussion with legislative people. I had not planned to bring them down here.

There was no plan to bring them down here, was there?

Q Is the nature of this meeting different from any of the other previous ones he has had on busing?

MR. NESSEN: I think they might talk more about -- these will be the people who would be sponsoring the President's legislation.

Q Well, don't you think we would be interested?

Q We would be interested.

Q Does that mean there is a definite commitment, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: There has been for a long time, you know that.

Q Is there any chance we could meet with them?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

Q Is the legislation --

MR. NESSEN: It is getting close.

Q By tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Not tomorrow.

Q You say Quie is the sponsor?

MR. NESSEN: No, I say that the sponsors will come from among these people who are attending the meeting. Larry will go talk to see what we can do.

Q Is this the last meeting before the --

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MR. NESSEN: There will be another meeting with legislative leaders later in the week.

Q What happened to the constitutional lawyers?

MR. NESSEN: They have offered their views to Attorney General Levi who in turn has relayed them to the President.

Q Well, these legislative leaders -- will they be the same group, or will it be by parties?

MR. NESSEN: The ones on Wednesday? I don't know who the exact participants will be but it will be different from the composition of today's meeting.

Q Late this week rather than now?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot fix an exact date, Ralph, but it is getting close.

Q Was the purpose of this meeting this morning to lay a draft copy in front of these people for them to see and discuss the specifics in the bill?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I am not sure if they have the current draft in written form in front of them but it will be outlined to them.

Q Ron, are you saying that the President has firmly and finally decided that he will submit legislation?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think that was decided a long time ago, Mort. I remember saying that two or three weeks ago.

Q Levi had an "if and when" the legislation becomes public law.

MR. NESSEN: There are several kinds of legislation. There is the one piece of legislation that the President asked the Justice Department to draft and that had to do with limiting busing and then there were another set of ideas that HEW Secretary Mathews had. I think I said a couple of weeks ago that the President was committed to going ahead with legislation to limit busing and that some of Mathews' ideas were still being discussed.

Q Now which legislation is it that it is positively decided that will go ahead? That is Levi's legislation?

MR. NESSEN: That's correct, but I am not saying that today for the first time.

Q I know but Levi had left some doubt whether -- I mean he said it was the President's decision finally, we are working it up and if and when it becomes public, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and some other people were saying that Mathews, among others, was concerned that the legislation might be in Congress in September just as school started and might be the focus of unrest in cities around the country and that, therefore, the President might postpone this whole thing. I take it that none of that is true?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any of that.

Q Mathews' legislation, is that a for sure thing also?

MR. NESSEN: That is going to be discussed today. He has got several different ideas.

Q Ron, does the President plan some meetings with delegates to the National Convention?

MR. NESSEN: Arch Moore indicated that the President was going to have lunch with some of the delegates from West Virginia but that is the only such meeting that I know of here at the White House.

Q Any uncommitted delegates?

Q Will this be the only luncheon?

MR. NESSEN: It is the only one that I know of so far.

Q Who is picking up the tab for that lunch?

MR. NESSEN: I suppose the President will either pay it out of his own pocket or the PFC.

Q Are these uncommitted delegates?

MR. NESSEN: No. Arch Moore announced the other day that 20 of the West Virginia delegates had announced their support for the President and that two more who were uncommitted were also coming to the lunch.

Q Aren't West Virginia's delegates always uncommitted?

MR. NESSEN: Technically uncommitted now but Arch Moore announced that 20 of the technically uncommitted delegates were actually for the President.

Q Ron, Mrs. Ford is going to the Minnesota Convention Friday. Is that going to be a pattern, to have her go out to these conventions instead of the President?

MR. NESSEN: I think she will be going to some of them, yes.

Q And he won't be going to any more?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't know that that is true.

Let me do my announcements first.

The President will be going to Indianapolis tomorrow to address the National Convention of the Jaycees. This event takes place at the Indianapolis Convention Center. The press check-in at Andrews is at 8:00 A.M. The press plane takes off tomorrow at 8:30. The President will leave the South Lawn by helicopter at 8:45 and leave Andrews I guess about 9:05.

The speech is at 10:30 Indianapolis time. I guess they are on the same time we are, and then the President will come back to Washington immediately after the speech, arriving on the South Lawn at 2:05 P.M. and he will have a schedule here at the office after the return.

Q What is the theme of the speech?

MR. NESSEN: The theme of the speech is along the lines of the principles and beliefs of the Jaycees reflecting and in many ways coinciding with the President's own philosophy and so forth.

Q Economic philosophy?

MR. NESSEN: Economic and broader than that, yes.

Q Do they permit women to be members?

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

Q Will there be a text?

MR. NESSEN: There will be, I hope, in the late afternoon or early evening a text for 6:00 A.M. release.

Q Ron, following up something that Frank said apropos of the schedule --

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you let me finish my announcements, Les, and then we will get to the questions?

Q Ron, on this trip I gather it is not a political trip.

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not.

Indianapolis is on standard time, is that right, an hour?

Q No.

Q They don't have daylight savings time. It is one of the few places where they are in the zone but stay on standard time.

MR. NESSEN: So 10:30 there is really 11:30 in Washington.

Then we are coming back at 2:05 Washington time, as I said. The sign-up sheet has just gone up and because there is not much time between now and the trip if you could sign up this morning before you go off to lunch, I would appreciate it.

Okay, we are trying to get you a speech out late this afternoon or early evening with a 6:00 A.M. release on it.

The other thing is that we are putting up a sign-up sheet for the Fourth of July day of travel and it could be maybe a larger number than usual will be wanting to go so if you could sign up there as early as possible, too, so we can figure out what we need in the way of transportation, I would appreciate it.

Q What about the fifth? Have you got a sheet for the fifth?

MR. NESSEN: To go to Monticello?

We will check.

The phone number for the White House recording to get your announcements over the telephone is being changed to 456-6666 so you can start using that this afternoon.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: OFF THE RECORD, the reason why is that the National Enquirer published the phone number and the lines now are jammed so that the reporters can't get their calls here.

Q Are they represented here today?

MR. NESSEN: Are they represented here today, the National Enquirer?

Q Are you asking?

MR. NESSEN: Are you the stringer for that, Helen?
(Laughter)

Q No. I am just wondering. You give us this phone number and you have not set any caveat as to whether it will be public or not.

MR. NESSEN: It is for legitimate reporters to call in and get information. If it is published again and misused again, we will have to change it again, I guess. We are going to keep the number because I think it is helpful.

Okay. This afternoon the President is going to record on audio tape a short Bicentennial message that will be made available to radio stations and networks if they want it. The audio tape will be available through the pool chairman. This month the pool chairman is Frank Jordan of NBC. Independent stations may also obtain a copy by contacting Mr. Jordan, or the gentleman here at the White House who handles Bicentennial matters named Milt Mitler.

Q Will it be played on the house mult at all?

MR. NESSEN: I think that was the plan.

Q When?

Q Are we getting a written transcript?

MR. NESSEN: We will get you one, right.

Q Is that like today, Bill?

MR. ROBERTS: Yes, 3:30.

Q When will that be used?

MR. NESSEN: Any time.

It is for immediate release, isn't it?

We will check out the details.

The other Bicentennial note is I have been asked by Mike Farrell to announce -- and we will do this again when we get closer to the date -- that because there might be more visitors than normal in Washington over the July 4 weekend, the President and Mrs. Ford have asked that the White House visiting hours on Saturday, July 3, be extended until 5:00 P.M.

Q When do they normally close?

MR. NESSEN: They normally close at 1:00, I think it is.

And also the White House will be open on Monday, July 5. As you know, Monday is usually not a visitors day here but it will be open on Monday, July 5, from 10:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M.

The new Bicentennial visitors waiting area on the Ellipse will be open both days and people who want to tour the White House those days should go to the booth and get their tickets which tell them what time they will be able to start through. The ticket booth is open at 8:00 A.M.

I think that's all my announcements.

Q Ron, following Frank's question about that you say there is no pattern of Mrs. Ford going out and so forth but as I recall she did go out to this last one, didn't she? I mean, there is some suspicion that wherever Reagan appears the President is sending Mrs. Ford to offset this. Is there any truth to this or not?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q I mean she is a very good campaigner.

MR. NESSEN: Very good campaigner.

Q But there is no suspicion of this at all?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, I think you have just reflected a certain amount of suspicion of that, Les.

Q I mean, there is none on your part. No foundation to such suspicion, is that true?

MR. NESSEN: Would you repeat the suspicion again?

Q The suspicion is that Mrs. Ford is being sent out wherever Reagan appears so that the President does not have to appear on the same platform -- he will send Mrs. Reagan -- not Mrs. Reagan, Mrs. Ford to out-dazzle Mr. Reagan. Is there any truth to that?

MR. NESSEN: No, there isn't.

Q There is not?

Q Do you have any political travel to announce?

MR. NESSEN: I do not.

Q You already did.

MR. NESSEN: No, there is none to announce.

Q You are not pushing the weekend?

MR. NESSEN: Isn't this the weekend we go to Puerto Rico?

Q How does the President view the weekend balloting and does he still expect to win on the first ballot?

MR. NESSEN: As far as we can tell, the delegates selected at conventions over the weekend turned out to be just about exactly how it was anticipated to turn out. The surprise, and it was a pleasant surprise, was the unexpected 20 delegates that the President picked up from the uncommitted slate in West Virginia. Other than that, the President does anticipate winning the nomination on the first ballot.

Q When was he surprised at that?

MR. NESSEN: When Arch Moore came and told him about it.

Q Yes, but the wires reported that about last Tuesday or Wednesday in Charleston.

MR. NESSEN: If they did, I didn't see it. I didn't see it. In fact, I saw some things indicating that the other side was counting a very large block of those in its column.

Q Why was that a surprise? The Ford Committee has been carrying a tentative count of 20 now for some weeks.

MR. NESSEN: But the surprise was that Arch Moore announced it publicly. (Laughter)

Q Ron, you also said that Arch Moore announced that the delegates were coming here to lunch. The President extended the invitation.

MR. NESSEN: Of course.

Q And that is going to be Wednesday, did you say?

MR. NESSEN: Friday.

Q For the 20 who have announced that they were for him and two uncommitted?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q Ron, out in Iowa there was a lot of brokering that went on before they came up with that 17-19 allocation. Did Spencer or any of the President's men check with him to say, "Listen, do you want us to go ahead and make a big fight over one or two delegates or do you want to go ahead and make a deal?"

MR. NESSEN: John, I am just not into the delegate selecting process that much. Peter Kaye can probably help with that.

Q How much is the President in control of these things, or is he giving these people sort of carte blanche to deal with it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. As you know, there were other things going on here Friday.

Q Could you project a little bit and let us know now from here to the Republican Convention -- for example, you don't know of any future travel?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Do you know how he is going to hunt for delegates and do you know what he will be doing during the Democratic Convention? Will he be working on his own problems?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any travel to announce.

The delegate hunting is being run by the PFC and they can help you with that. I don't know what his plans will be during the Democratic Convention other than to continue to do his job.

Q Well, he has a personal involvement in this, doesn't he?

MR. NESSEN: In the Democratic Convention?

Q No, in the delegate hunt.

MR. NESSEN: Oh. Well, I think he has indicated that he would make a few phone calls if it were to be helpful.

Q Is he still making telephone calls at night?

MR. NESSEN: Well, these last couple of days have been busy, as you know, Muriel, and I don't really know precisely which delegates he is calling, how many.

Q Can you tell us how the President feels about the state of his candidacy? Here we have an incumbent President who, since the New Hampshire primary, has not been able to lock up his own party's nomination, and I think if the figures are correct that in the popular voting through the primaries, the challenger has actually drawn more popular votes than he has.

MR. NESSEN: No, I think that is not correct.

Q There was one stage, going into Ohio and California, ---

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I know, but for some strange reason you left out five States which I could never figure out why that was done.

Q In any event, you have an incumbent President battling for his political life against a challenger from the right wing of his own party. Does he feel his candidacy is in any way shaky or does he think he is still a strong candidate?

MR. NESSEN: He is confident of winning on the first ballot and of winning in the fall. I don't know what more I can tell you.

Q I have heard you say that before but my question was not is he confident of winning on the first ballot. My question was does he believe he is a strong candidate?

MR. NESSEN: He believes he is a good President and that that will translate into the support of members of his party and finally of the country as a whole.

Q Ron, the New York Times reports today that regarding the repeal of the Byrd Amendment, the President "might seek legislation on this symbolic but important matter in the Senate in the fall," and it quotes an official of the White House as saying, "We don't want to take the chance of losing on this one."

Now my question is is this true and, if so, does this adhere to Secretary Kissinger's promise in Lusaka?

MR. NESSEN: I don't follow exactly the quotations you were giving, Les, but as I have indicated to you each time you have brought up the question, the Administration from the beginning has been committed to the repeal of the Byrd Amendment. There is legislation pending in Congress to repeal the Byrd Amendment and Secretary Kissinger, enunciating President Ford's policy, has gone and testified in favor of the repeal.

Q In other words, this is an erroneous report in the New York Times, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't follow the quotations that you gave me.

Q I just quoted it, Ron. It quoted a White House official as saying that they are going to postpone it until the fall. Now is this an erroneous report or not, to your knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it seems to me that since the legislation is pending in Congress and the Administration has testified in favor of the repeal, that the legislative schedule or timetable would be set by Congress.

Q I understand all that. Then actually this is an erroneous report in the New York Times.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q In other words, no White House official would really say such a thing.

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you what the policy of the President is.

Q Ron, do you have anything new on Syria today or Lebanon or that whole situation over there that you want to give us?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there is anything further to add to the developments over the weekend.

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Q Ron, can you explain how the security was provided for the Americans and the others to get down to the Mediterranean and what kind of arrangements were worked out with other shipping in the area to allow the Navy landing craft to get in?

MR. NESSEN: Well, on that latter part I think you have to check with the Pentagon. I don't know that much details.

The other part of your question related to --

Q The security of getting down there.

MR. NESSEN: Well, we had received in advance assurances that the Americans and the others would be able to depart safely.

Q Where did they come from and who was the go-between? How were the messages transmitted?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't want to spell it out. Clearly since there was no direct contact with the PLO, as I said, all weekend, that the assurances came through third parties. I think this is clear.

Q Have you received any information which you did not have last week immediately after it happened as to why the Ambassador and the Economic Advisor, why that car was left without any protection?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that here, Ted.

Q Does someone have that?

MR. NESSEN: I have been reading Funseth's briefings and that has been explored with him and whether he has any further information I don't know.

Q Ron, can you tell us now what were the crucial decisions the President had to make last Friday that necessitated his remaining here rather than going to Iowa?

MR. NESSEN: I think in hindsight especially it is clear that the kind of situation that was being dealt with first of all, the decision had already been made to urge Americans to evacuate and then there were decisions concerning what method to use and the pros and cons of each method and what contingencies had to be considered in case anything had gone wrong, let's say, with the method chosen.

Q Ron, were any of these crucial decisions made during the period of time the President planned to be in Iowa, some ten hours he planned to be there or en route?

MR. NESSEN: I would have to go back and check the chronology of what was decided when, Ed.

Q What is the situation there today? What kind of report has the President been given?

MR. NESSEN: On the situation in Lebanon?

Q Is he still getting briefings?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes. Of course he gets his morning intelligence report every morning which contains, this morning, information on the situation.

Q Has he talked to anybody about it?

MR. NESSEN: He had a meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld this morning at which I am sure this as well as other matters came up.

Q Did he ever talk to any of the Russians with any hotline calls or anything?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge there weren't, Bob.

Q Have there been any since?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge there have not been.

Q No communication?

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I know.

Q Ron, if my recollection is correct, the President was due back here from Iowa something like ten thirty Friday evening.

MR. NESSEN: I think that is right.

Q Which would have been about an hour and a half before the Americans began to assemble and depart Lebanon.

MR. NESSEN: I think that is right.

Q Were there any decisions up to ten thirty Friday evening that he would have had to make relative to that departure?

MR. NESSEN: I told Ed I would have to check the chronology to see which decisions were made when. If there were or if there weren't, I am not sure that that is important. The fact is he was here where he could deal with developments as they occurred.

Q Can't he do that while he is on Air Force One? Ron, I understand they have tremendous communication and everybody is there. I mean he certainly has --

MR. NESSEN: Well, everybody is not there.

Q Or can be reached.

MR. NESSEN: I think you know that a number of maps and so forth were used which were not on the plane, and of course he had meetings with what became a fairly standard group and he felt he could deal better with the developing situation from here than from an airplane or from a convention hall.

Q Ron, was former Governor Carter given any briefing about the events of the weekend or is all of that going to wait until he becomes the official nominee of the Democratic Party?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge he was not and I think procedures have been established in past elections once there is a candidate.

Q I have a question on another subject if they are finished with this.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q One last thing on the PLO. When Yassir Arafat came to the UN the embassy in Beirut did have contact with the PLO to make all the counselor arrangements, it was not denied. Now without trying to make too much out of this, the Jim Markum story from Beirut today had an American official quoted as saying that he knew the PLO guy who was doing some of the security arrangements on the spot.

Now can't we be candid about the extent of our contacts with the PLO to say, yes, that in this situation maybe we did have direct contacts, or are you absolutely flatly denying that we had any?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge there were no direct contacts with the PLO.

Q Ron, why not? Why would we be so concerned at having direct contact? I mean what is the difference really in indirect contact and contact as long as you get the job done and the people out? Why not indirect contact?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I am not enough of an expert on the state of diplomacy there to really answer that question.

Q I mean do we still consider them a group that we don't think is entitled to direct contact, that we don't want to give them that kind of prestige?

MR. NESSEN: I think the State Department can help you with that, John. I am just not enough of an expert.

Q Just because you say you have no knowledge of it does not necessarily mean it did not happen.

MR. NESSEN: I stayed fairly close to this, Bob, over the weekend.

Q There have been some international things in the past where you have been excluded on occasion. We should not take that as a flat statement that it didn't happen.

MR. NESSEN: I can only tell you the state of my knowledge and also the fact that I remained very close to the developments over the weekend.

Q Ron, what is the reaction to this Israeli press report? They said, you know, some had far too much fanfare and that actually it should have been a very simple operation. They are saying that it was obviously done for political reasons and hence the President's prestige. Have you seen that story?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen it, I have heard of it.

I am going to decline to talk about this operation in any way that links it with American politics.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Pardon?

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because there is no link.

America, of course, was the last nation to decide to evacuate its troops, --

Q Troops?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, evacuate its civilians. I didn't see any such stories when the British decided, when the French decided, when the Saudi Arabians decided, when the United Nations decided that the situation in Beirut was such that for the safety of their civilians they decided to evacuate. The United States was the last country that decided to evacuate its civilians. Now I am willing to talk about those aspects but I am certainly not going to say anything that involves any kind of linkage.

Q Is the President disappointed that only 116 took him up on the offer?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what would bring the use of the word "disappointment," Howard. These are obviously 116 people, plus the others of other nationalities, who felt that they would like to leave Lebanon and there was no other way for them to leave. I think we have been over the numbers before in terms of those who live in relatively safe zones and those whose ties are far more with Lebanon than they are with America even though they technically carry American passports.

Q Could we meet with the busing people or are they outside?

MR. NESSEN: The Senate has a vote at twelve thirty and the House has a quorum call right away and so the group says that it prefers to leave without briefing.

Q Could I raise a political question if this subject has been exhausted?

MR. NESSEN: If it is unrelated to this.

Q I just would like to ask when they get to Athens -- or maybe they are there, I don't know -- does the United States, will the Air Force fly the people here or what? What happens?

MR. NESSEN: We were going to check and find out what their status is once they reached Athens.

We will check and find out.

Q Did you by chance see Meet the Press yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: I did not. I was trying to get some sleep.

Q Well, as you may or may not know, the Carter camp was giving out a fairly extensive process by which the likely Democratic nominee will choose a Vice President. Now last week you cautioned us against speculating as to who the President may choose as his Vice President.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I did something other than that, too, Walt. I just said that if anybody in this building pretends to know, you are being led around by the nose because no one in this building knows.

Q So my question is, is President Ford developing any process by which he will choose a Vice President other than the traditional method of him deciding at the convention or very quietly announcing it, or very quietly deciding and then announcing it at the convention? That is to say, is the President going to make any unusual efforts as to choosing a Vice President? I am not asking about who, I am just asking about the process.

MR. NESSEN: At the moment he alone is considering who his Vice President potential running mate should be. He has not discussed it with anybody. Now what procedure he follows a little further down the pike, I cannot give you today.

Q Could you ask him, because apparently the Vice Presidential choices on both sides will get some attention this year and I was wondering if you could give us some idea as to the thought process and the actual physical process by which the President will choose his running mate?

MR. NESSEN: I will ask, yes.

Q Ron, I was wondering, this morning Iran announced it is going to buy a big chunk of the Occidental Petroleum Company.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there any reaction from here to that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Specifically what I was wondering is how does this square with the President's goals of energy independence to have an American oil company being partially bought by Iran?

MR. NESSEN: I will check. I didn't have time to look into it.

Q Ron, will there be a press conference this week?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for one right now.

Q Is there anything in on the Italian election? Does the President have a reaction?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know there is nothing in on the Italian elections.

Q Shall we go to the PFC to get the results?
(Laughter)

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 12:15 P.M. EDT)