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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:38 A.M. EDT

JULY 23, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: This meeting of the President with the Cabinet officials and agency heads, which you saw the beginning of, is continuing. After this briefing, we will pass out a printed statement by the President dealing with his directions to improve the management of the Government, the efficiency of it; to continue the reduction of forms and paperwork; and also, as some of you heard him say in there, not only reduce the number of forms, but reduce the amount of time that is required to fill out Government forms. So, we will have that statement for you right after this briefing.

Q What were all of those forms in front of them?

MR. NESSEN: Those were the 600, and some, which have been eliminated under his direction, and this was a report from Jim Lynn to him and a demonstration of the actual forms which are no longer required.

At lunchtime today, the President is having --

Q Excuse me, before you go on, did he say that it now takes longer to fill out the forms?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. The total number of man-hours to fill out forms has actually increased, even though the number of forms have decreased. I don't know whether Jim said it at the meeting or whether he said it privately to the President.

A large part of that is caused by two new forms required by Congress. One has to do with settlement of real estate transactions and the other has to do with the new Pension Reform Act. There are new forms required to carry out those two pieces of legislation, which require a lot of time, so the actual number of estimated man-hours that people spend on Government forms has increased, even though the number of forms has decreased.

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Q Is any of that possibly attributable to the fact some forms may have been consolidated?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that, Dick. I know Jim Lynn has indicated he will be most happy to talk to people on the phone or in his office about further details of this.

Q The reason I raise the question is simply that if, in fact, you reduce the number of forms, but the forms that are being used are just bigger now, have you really accomplished very much?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is the general trend, but you ought to talk to Jim.

Q Ron, in the Real Estate Settlement Act, the form itself released the information to be made available, and the form was the primary intent of that legislation, as I recall.

MR. NESSEN: This was to make the customer aware of the charges he would face at settlement time.

Q Does the President oppose that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't mean to suggest he opposes either one of those bills. I want to be candid with you and not make you think something has happened which has not happened, and the number of hours is higher than it used to be.

The main reason pointed out to the President was those two pieces of legislation. There was no suggestion for that reason those copies ought to be scrapped or something like that, but that is an explanation.

Q The forms are required by the Government workers or by everybody?

MR. NESSEN: Everybody. The total number of hours spent by Americans on forms is 140 million hours a year. I think you may have heard the President say in there he wants that reduced by 7 million hours -- 5 percent -- by fiscal 1977, which is September 30th of 1977. He wants the number of person-hours, which is now 140 million a year, to fill out Government forms by both private citizens and Government officials, reduced by 5 percent or, in other words, 7 million hours of form filling reduced.

Q How many forms are there now?

MR. NESSEN: It was reduced 12-1/2 percent, which was roughly 600 documents and there are roughly 4500 left.

Q What was it before?

MR. NESSEN: 5100 before, roughly.

Q Is that in the release, these figures you are giving out?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is.

Q How many man-hours did it take to figure out all those statistics?

MR. NESSEN: It took about ten minutes this morning, Ann. There were three of us working on it, so it would be 30 minutes, or half a man-hour.

Q These figures you are giving us, what is the time-frame we are dealing with?

MR. NESSEN: On the reduction, the President gave that directive last fall -- toward the end of last summer or early last fall -- about ten or eleven months.

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Q The committees keep talking about oversight. Has Mr. Lynn reported this to any of the committees involved in the additional work manhours required to fill out what they have put in law?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure. That is a good question, but I am not sure of whether he has passed on this information to Congress.

At lunchtime today, the President has invited the delegation to the Republican Convention from the Virgin Islands to have lunch with him here at the White House. There are nine members of that delegation, consisting of four delegates, four alternates and a chairman.

As I understand it, they are already committed to the President. The President will also have Rog Morton there at lunch. As I understand it, the delegation requested the opportunity to come in and meet the President, and he invited them to lunch.

Q Where will the lunch be served?

MR. NESSEN: In the Residence.

Q What will they have?

MR. NESSEN: I have to check the menu.

Q Who is paying for them to come all the way from the Virgin Islands for lunch?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that they were here for other purposes.

I am told they were here lobbying for legislation of interest to their area.

Q Ron, is the President getting many appeals from delegates who see where the action is and they say, "Can we see you because you are seeing so many others?" I am serious.

MR. NESSEN: I noticed Bob Schieffer ran a commercial last night that ought to produce a lot of phone calls up here.

Q Is that an example, they have been reading about it, they see so many delegates and they say why not us?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask Jim Baker. He keeps track of the delegate thing. I don't know.

Q Is this part of their lobbying effort?

MR. NESSEN: I think they are already committed to the President.

Q No, their lobbying efforts for the legislation?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't make him aware of what their interests are.

Q Which are?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the Virgin Island interests are. The President said if they asked him, he supposed he might come down there and visit the Virgin Islands. We all cheered him on in that. That is sort of a joke.

On Saturday, tomorrow, the President's schedule is at this point mostly staff meetings, or all staff meetings, and by the end of the day we will try to give you a rundown on that.

Sunday it is possible he will play golf in the afternoon. I knew you would like that. They have all the trees off the golf course.

For Sunday morning, church is possible, but as you know he never makes up his mind until Saturday on that.

Q Why is that, Ron, that he never makes up his mind until Saturday? If he knows about golf, why is he hesitant about church? (Laughter) Ron, give us an answer.

MR. NESSEN: He likes to keep his options open. (Laughter)

Q A certain Sunday school teacher never has any doubt about that, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The President has directed Secretary Butz to send a team of Agriculture Department officials to California to determine what crop losses there might be if the strike in the cannery industry goes on. The assessment will be made on the basis of what damage would be caused to the crop if the strike lasted one week, another assessment of damage if it lasted two weeks, another assessment of a strike lasting three weeks, its effect on the crops and final assessment of the effect on the crop if the strike lasted for more than three weeks.

Q Is that announcement also being made at Agriculture?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Did he ask Usery to look into this as well?

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Usery read the announcement that the Federal Mediation Service has been monitoring the situation all through the negotiations.

The Labor Department is not directly in there, is it?

MR. CARLSON: Usery is following the situation closely.

MR. NESSEN: Okay, that is right. The Director of the Federal Conciliation and Mediation Service, whose name is James Searce, met through the night and again this morning here in Washington with the California Processors, Inc. -- that would be the representative of the canners -- and the California Council of Cannery Workers.

Q Do you know how long the strike has been going on?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that the Mediation Service statement this morning did indicate that there was some encouragement to be found in the attitude of the two sides and that the negotiations are going forward.

Q Ron, I wonder, is the President seeking this information to determine whether he will take any intervention in the public interest?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment there are no plans to invoke Taft-Hartley.

Q Ron, do you know if the new migrant labor, or farm labor law that Brown signed out there affects this situation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I am just not that much of an expert on it.

The strike began at 10:00 a.m. Pacific Time on July 20.

Q How many workers are involved?

MR. NESSEN: Approximately 55,000 workers.

Q What is that union, Ron? Is that a Teamsters or the United Farm Workers?

MR. NESSEN: It is a Teamsters' union.

I shouldn't actually be sort of announcing this background, but just so you sort of understand why the President has directed Butz to send a team out there, I thought I would give you this background.

Q Do you know if this is just canning or is this all kinds of food packaging; for example, frozen as well? Do you know anything about that?

MR. NESSEN: It is called canneries, and I don't know any more than the fact that it involves canneries.

The guy at the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service is named Norm Walker, whom many of you may know. His phone number is 653-5290 and he can really get into this to a greater degree than I can.

Q When will the team go out, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will have to ask Agriculture when they will depart. The President has directed that Butz send them, and I don't know when they will depart.

Q Do you know if Butz will head the team?

MR. NESSEN: No, he will not go himself.

Q Ron, since there could be as many as 300 executions this October, does the President believe that this number of killings will be less traumatic to the nation than if he had allowed the trial of Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand your question, Les.

Q As I recall, the President has twice explained that he felt it would be very traumatic to the nation, with all our other concerns, to allow Mr. Nixon to go on trial, so he pardoned Mr. Nixon. So now we are contemplated with a real blood bath, 300 executions that could take place in October and I wondered, was there a possibility he might reprieve or commute rather than have this wave of executions?

Please, Dick.

Q No, I am amused by it.

Q I know, but I don't interrupt you, Dick, and would appreciate it if you didn't interrupt me.

Ron, could we get back to this? It is a pretty serious subject.

Q What does it have to do with executions?

Q You ask your questions, Growald, and I will ask mine.

How does the President view the possibility of 300 executions in October?

MR. NESSEN: If I understand Justice Powell's ruling yesterday, that matter is still being considered by the courts, and I don't think I ought to comment on it while it is, Les.

Q What about Nixon? (Laughter)

Q Why is it important for the White House or Agriculture to know the negative extent of this strike?

MR. NESSEN: I think Fran probably points in the direction of at least having all the basic facts in case it were necessary to take further steps from here to protect the public interest.

Q Can you state on the record whether or not that is a situation where the President will invoke Taft-Hartley?

MR. NESSEN: I think at this time it is premature to talk about Taft-Hartley.

Q You pointed to it in answer to Fran's question so I --

MR. NESSEN: If there are going to be any further steps at the Federal level you need to know the facts and whether it does indeed have an effect on the public's interest.

Q Ron, has any later development reached the President's desk on this evacuation from Lebanon? Do you know when that is going to go forward and how?

MR. NESSEN: It has been postponed, as you know, because of the general security situation there. We do expect the evacuation to take place. The plans are currently for it to go by road, but beyond that I don't have anything further.

Q A campaign official in Hartford, Connecticut said he felt by today they would have 1130 delegates committed for the President announced. Has the President been advised he has 1130 delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I think you ought to talk to Jim Baker or the people over there who deal with delegate counts.

Q The question is, has he been advised that he has the delegate count?

MR. NESSEN: Not in my presence he has not.

Q Could you find out?

Q That is not much of an answer.

MR. NESSEN: It is the only answer I have.

Q He might have been advised of a lot of things when you are not there. Do you know whether or not he has been advised?

MR. NESSEN: He hasn't met with Jim Baker this morning that I know of.

Q Will you answer the question? Has he been advised that he now has more than the 1130 or at least 1130?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, he hasn't.

Q Could you find out if he has been advised? Will you try and expand your knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I will try to expand my knowledge.

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Q Since Baker has a news conference at three o'clock, would the President be advised of whatever Baker might be saying over there in the President's behalf?

MR. NESSEN: Not necessarily. (Laughter)

He is aware of the news conference and of the general subject.

Q Wait a minute. Does that mean that in fact you are telling us Baker will not be saying that he now has 1,130 delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will not jump the gun on Jim Baker's news conference.

Q I don't want to twist your words in any way, but you said, as far as you know, he has not been told he has the number, but you said he was aware of the general nature of the remarks that Baker plans to make.

MR. NESSEN: I said, the general nature, or purpose, of the news conference.

Q Then, presumably, I think we can draw the conclusion, from what you are saying, that he is not going to announce that?

MR. NESSEN: I think you ought to wait until you hear Baker's news conference. I, frankly, don't know what Baker is going to say, myself, in specific terms.

Q Ron, has a decision been made that Mississippi would be on the 30th?

MR. NESSEN: No, that decision has not been made.

Q Question.

MR. NESSEN: Has any decision been made for the President to go to Mississippi next week.

Q Earlier this week, the President said he expects to have some good news in a few days in reference to the delegate count. Should we assume the announcement at three o'clock is the good news he was referring to earlier this week?

MR. NESSEN: I think there was some good news earlier this week. Wasn't there 15 or 16 delegates announced on Tuesday?

Q Yes, but he said he expected more by the end of the week.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is certainly right here at the end of the week, isn't it?

Q Does the President have a list of people he telephones before he goes to bed at night? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any list. I know he calls people from time to time.

Q Delegates?

MR. NESSEN: He calls delegates from time to time.

Q Including before he goes to bed at night?

MR. NESSEN: He likes to get his official business out of the way first, and then, whatever hours he might have at the end of the day, he might call a delegate or two.

Q Is there any pressure being brought on the President by the people of Mississippi for him to appear there before the 30th?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge. I haven't gotten into that Mississippi thing all that much, but I don't know of any pressure being brought.

Q What do you know about the swine flu vaccine situation?

MR. NESSEN: I know Dr. Cooper is scheduled to testify before Congressman Rogers' subcommittee this morning. I thought the testimony would have started by now, but we will check on that.

If he testifies today, he would present to the committee a letter from the President to Congressman Rogers and I would be happy to make that letter available here once he has introduced it into the committee hearings.

Q Is it a proposal for compromise legislation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that I would use the word "compromise." It is a proposal to clear the way for the immunization program to go forward, to resolve one or two of the problems that have come up.

Q Ron, yesterday, the Connor memo was released to some of us and the President's instructions in there were, as we concluded, pretty much a restatement of the Federal statute, vis-a-vis bribes and so on.

The President or Mr. Connor did not say in that memo what he expects a member of the President's Committee to do if indeed solicitation is made by an uncommitted delegate or by someone else for a job or political favor. What does the President expect his campaign people to do in such an event?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is clear from this memo, Walt, even though the memo is not directly directed at the campaign folks who deal more directly with delegates. I think it is clear. I talked to Jim Baker myself and I know what his attitude is and the President has been told that that is the procedure followed.

Q There is nothing in that memorandum that instructs those who -- or covered by the memorandum -- to report the solicitation to any law enforcement authority?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, we keep talking about solicitations and people demanding jobs and sewer projects, and so forth. We have been talking about that for a week or so here, and it seems to have gotten set in the public minds that there is a tremendous amount of this.

First of all, I don't know that there is any. Secondly, I think it is wrong, really, to impugn the integrity of over 2,000 delegates to the Republican Convention who represent their States and their communities and people all over this country who are taking part in a great political system to pick and judge our Presidents.

To sit here and do what we do each day here, it just seems to me to be unfair to over 2,200 people to cast this kind of blanket charge over them, that all they care about is jobs and sewers and projects and so forth.

These people, at least the ones I have met, are very dedicated, interested people who are taking part in a process, who have one thing in mind and that is to do the best job they can to choose the man they think will make the best President of the United States.

I just felt this sort of building up and I thought I would mention it today, that I personally, this is just a personal view of mine, feel that each day it is wrong to cast this kind of -- or to besmirch, if you will, the motives of these people who are playing a role in a great American political process.

Q I am impugning nothing. The Secretary of the Cabinet sent this memo out and it was the Secretary of the Cabinet and the President of the United States who raised and opened this issue, not the reporters, by sending that memorandum. The memorandum covers, as far as we can tell, half of the situation. It covers instructions to the people covered by the memorandum not to entertain any such solicitations.

It does not, however, say what they should do if they receive a solicitation. It does not say whether they should or should not be silent on the question of whether they should report this to a law enforcement agency.

MR. NESSEN: First of all, do you know of any solicitations?

Q May I finish? I am asking why that memorandum does not cover the eventuality of receiving a solicitation, or something construed as a solicitation, and reporting to a law enforcement authority?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any solicitations, Jim. I know this memo is very clear in its application to public officials and the President knows that those at the Committee who deal with delegates also have the attitude of not entertaining any suggestions, if there were any.

Q Fine, but that is not my question. My question is, what is the policy if it did happen? Are they to report it to a law enforcement official, or not?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to take on a hypothetical question that suggests that these 2,200 people, who are playing their part in the political process, somehow would or have done something improper.

Q That is not a hypothetical question.

MR. NESSEN: I think it is incorrect and really unfair to those people.

Q There is a basic inconsistency in your response here. The President obviously felt motivated to tell these people what to do it --

MR. NESSEN: I noticed the memo some people got hold of yesterday was depicted as a reaction to some of these suggestions. Of course, it was dated Monday, but it was in the works before Monday. It was a follow-up on a memo put out over six months ago, in January, and it really reflects the tone that the President has brought to the White House from the very first day he came here. So, there is nothing new or different or reactive about that memo.

Q It is a simple question. Does the President expect his campaign people to live up to the law and report any wrongdoing in the nature of solicitations?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, it is the same question you asked yesterday which you prefaced yourself by saying, you were not a lawyer, but you would like to throw this out. I am not a lawyer, either.

Q Does the President expect the Cabinet, the White House staff and the campaign officials to live up to the law as the law applies to this memo?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I am not going to give you the opportunity to write that the President today ordered his campaign staff to live up to the law.

Q Why not? (Laughter)

Q Why not, he has taken the oath of office.

Q Don't you think it is a good ideal?

MR. NESSEN: No, I really don't and I think it is unfair to 2,200 people.

Q You don't think it is a good ideal?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, you are refusing to answer Jim's question because you say it is a hypothetical situation. Aren't you then saying that the President's letter to the Cabinet members dealt with situations that were not hypothetical that were happening?

MR. NESSEN: No. That question was asked yesterday, why did he order it prepared last week and why did it go out on Monday. The answer is, as I said yesterday, we are into a different segment of the political zone. The memo, as you saw, if you saw one, dealt, to a great extent, with proper conduct and expenditure of funds in the Kansas City Convention, which is coming.

Q That is hypothetical, right?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not hypothetical.

Q The memo was given to us and didn't need translation. The question is, did it deal with a hypothetical situation or did it deal with an existing situation? If it dealt with a hypothetical situation, why, then, can't you answer Jim's question?

MR. NESSEN: It is a restatement of a policy that, first of all, was put in memo form in January, and is merely a writing down of the policy the President has made clear he expects the Administration to follow. He made that clear when he came to the White House.

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Q Ron, if you have been talking to Jim Baker, no doubt he has told you, as he has told some of us, that there have been specific instances where delegates have suggested they need employment and would like Baker to help them find it. He told us he did not report that to the White House, and he did not report it to any authority.

MR. NESSEN: I hope he didn't report it to the White House. That is the whole point. He is not supposed to report anything like that to the White House. He is supposed to tell the people right to their face that he doesn't listen to that kind of thing. I understand that is what he does.

Q That is where the President wants it to end?

MR. NESSEN: That is where it does end.

Q Not under the law.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the law. That is what I told Walt yesterday, Jim. If there are solicitations -- and, as I say, I think it is truly unfair to over 2200 public spirited citizens to suggest that they make their decision on the basis of a sewer project or something else -- it is just unfair to those people.

Q It was unfair by your reasoning then for the President to instruct Mr. Connors to issue such a memorandum in the first place six months ago and then to reaffirm it again on Monday?

MR. NESSEN: It is a modification of the tone that he has set for this Administration since he came here.

Q I would like to ask how these instructions to Cabinet members and others who are covered by this memorandum can have any teeth if there is no reporting requirement?

MR. NESSEN: There again, Jim, if you start with the premise that 2200 people who are taking part in the nomination process make their decision on the basis of coming around here and asking for jobs and projects and so forth, you have to start with that premise to answer that question.

Q I don't start with that premise, and I don't understand why you have to start with that premise at all. Policies are issued to cover eventualities at all times in all Governments. I am asking again what is the endorsement, what are the teeth in these instructions without a reporting requirement?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President's instructions to his Cabinet are clear, were clear in January, and were clear in August of 1974 when he came here.

Q Ron, why do you say it is all right that he should not report to the White House yet he reports to reporters but does not report to the Justice Department? I am confused. Are the reporters supposed to be the ones he reports this to? He is the one that has raised this issue, Ron. The reporters didn't, he did.

MR. NESSEN: That is not what he told me.

Q The fact is the memorandum raised the issue back in January. I am still at a loss as to your reasoning when you raise an issue --

MR. NESSEN: Jim, you know I didn't raise this issue. I responded for a couple of days to questions about it. You would agree, I am sure, I did not raise this issue.

Q Is it fair to assume from what you have said that as far as the President is concerned he feels it is up to his campaign officials to simply ignore any possible solicitations and that is where the matter ends?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly expects them to ignore any, if there are any, and I don't know of any.

Q Can you answer the rest of the question?

MR. NESSEN: What was the rest of it?

Q That is where the matter ends, that he does not want them to report any possible wrongdoing any further, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, as I have said about seven times in the past few days, I don't know what, if any, legal requirements there are, if there were any solicitations.

Q Why haven't you checked?

MR. NESSEN: Because the President has made clear to his public officials --

Q You answered the questions in the same way and suggested we are besmirching the character of all these folks and their motives.

MR. NESSEN: Not their motives.

Q That is what you said.

MR. NESSEN: I think there is a casting of doubt on how they make decisions.

Q We know your view, but you said you don't even know what the law says.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q There is an attorney in the room. He can find it very easily.

MR. NESSEN: Where is he?

Q Mr. O'Rourke.

MR. NESSEN: Would you, Larry?

Q If Walt would like to engage me at my standard research fee. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You know we don't have any money left in the campaign and can't afford to engage Mr. O'Rourke.

The President's letter to Congressman Rogers I understand has now been entered into the hearing, and if you would like to pick up a copy, we have them available.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

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