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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:10 P.M. EDT

JULY 29, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The schedule remains as it was announced.

At 3 o'clock this afternoon, we will have a short written report on the meeting between the President and the Turkish Opposition Leader, Mr. Ecevit.

In case you see a crowd of people arriving in the early afternoon, this is another one of the briefings for the husbands and wives of White House Presidential appointees scheduled for 2:30 this afternoon. You may remember there was a similar one a while back.

About 250 husbands and wives of Presidential appointees will be briefed by Kissinger, Rumsfeld, Alan Greenspan and Jeanne Holm.

Q Is that open for coverage?

MR. NESSEN: No, there was no plan to.

Q Will the President be there?

MR. NESSEN: No, he does not plan to drop in. I am sorry, there are no plans for the President to attend, in case there was any misunderstanding.

The outlook for the speech text for tonight is cloudy. I really can't tell you right now whether we will have it or not, but later in the afternoon, we will, hopefully, be able to say yes or no.

Right after this briefing, we will have ready to hand you the summary schedule for tomorrow's trip to Jackson, Mississippi. Just to run through it quickly, the press check-in at Andrews is 10:00 and the takeoff there by the press plane is 10:30. The President will leave Andrews by Air Force One at 11:20. The arrival point is the Allen C. Thompson Airport in Jackson at the Delta freight ramp.

MORE

#547

Then, just by way of coming back, the President will be leaving Jackson at 6:30. Incidentally, the Jackson times are Central Daylight Time, an hour behind Eastern Daylight. He will be getting back to Andrews at 9:35, which would put the President back at the White House roughly a little before 10:00, and the press plane should be landing at Andrews about 10:00.

Q What time does he land in Jackson?

MR. NESSEN: 12:30 Central Daylight, which would be 1:30 in the East. The line-up of events there, at least as it stands now, basically consists of a meeting at the Ramada Inn with the 60 delegates and alternate delegates. That is a private meeting, which means no coverage.

Then, there is a series of meetings with smaller groups and individual delegates through most of the afternoon. The only really public event down there is a reception at 5:30 at the Ramada Inn. That will have enlarged pool coverage, and that is going to be about the only event.

Q Will he have a news conference on arrival?

MR. NESSEN: He does not plan to have a news conference upon arrival.

Q Any remarks any place along the way?

MR. NESSEN: It is possible there will be a microphone at the 5:30 reception, should he want to speak, but it is not definite.

Q What is the President going to be doing at 3:00 to 5:00 in the time blocked out for Presidential business?

MR. NESSEN: Talking to delegates.

Q What is he going to be talking about?

MR. NESSEN: Why they should support him.

Q Does he know how much support he has yet there now, or what is the reaction to Reed?

MR. NESSEN: I would say that he believes he has widespread support.

Q In Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, in the Mississippi delegation.

Q Do you mean a majority?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just say widespread support. I am not a delegate counter.

Q Is he going to ask them to abandon the unit rule?

MR. NESSEN: He is not going to ask them anything that has to do with their own procedures, when to vote or where to vote or anything else. All he is going to do is explain to them and answer their questions in terms of why he wants their support.

But, he is not in any way going to attempt to suggest or tell or anything, when they should take their vote or make their decision.

MORE

Q Ron, in the same connection, Clarke Reed said yesterday that the President had assured him that the Vice President would be philosophically compatible with the President. Can you confirm that for us?

MR. NESSEN: Based on a couple of questions we have had over the past couple of days, I went back and sort of reviewed what the President has said publicly about that very issue. I find that he has said publicly that the person he chose would be compatible with his views on major domestic and international issues and compatible with him personally. That has been said before.

We are pulling together a list of places and dates when he said that publicly. He did reiterate his public position, and he reiterated that to Clarke Reed and to others who have talked to him about this issue.

Q Could you pursue that? In his conversation with Clarke Reed -- since you have confirmed that he did say what you say he said --

MR. NESSEN: And to others, Aldo, who talked to him about this issue.

Q But I would like to focus in on Reed's telephone conversation. Did he in fact assure him that he would not pick a member of the Republican Party that is generally acknowledged to be in what is generally known as the liberal wing?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to go beyond this general view of the President on his running mate, which he has stated publicly and privately before.

Q The President himself has listed about 12 people at different times over the past many months. Does he consider all those that he has mentioned personally as compatible?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know which of the names you are talking about.

Q I am talking about all that he has mentioned.

Q Well, start with Ed Brooke. He mentioned him in North Carolina.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going through any list and give them any kind of grading today.

Q I am not asking for that. I am asking, the ones he has named himself, does he consider them part of the package?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean, part of the package.

Q As potential candidates, acceptable candidates.

MR. NESSEN: All I can say is what the President has said before, which is that his choice will be compatible personally and on the major issues of domestic and foreign policy.

Q Ron, he intentionally kept Reagan's name. He did not rule out Mr. Reagan. Are you suggesting that he thinks that Mr. Reagan is compatible? Is that what you mean by compatibility?

MR. NESSEN: Les, since the process of selecting a running mate has begun, I don't think I am going to -- in the days ahead -- take this name and then that name and then another name and grade them as to their compatibility.

Q I don't want you to do that. I am just very puzzled, Ron, because it seems to me there is a contradiction here. You say the President has assured repeatedly that it will only be a person that is compatible (a), and (b) he has intentionally kept it open for Mr. Reagan.

My question is, does he therefore feel Mr. Reagan is what he would term compatible?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I am going to grade Mr. Reagan or any of the others.

Q Ron, does the President consider Vice President Rockefeller compatible on issues?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, this is exactly what I am not going to do, is to take an ever proliferating list of names and say yes or no or maybe.

Q I am not asking the question with Vice President Rockefeller in mind.

MR. NESSEN: The first criteria -- as I told you yesterday and as the President emphasized to me this morning -- when he considers who to recommend as his Vice Presidential running mate the number one criteria and the most important point is that the person be totally qualified to assume the Presidency if necessary. That is the number one consideration.

Q Did he also comment on the report spread by Congressman Rhodes that he will let the convention do the selecting?

MR. NESSEN: He did not get into that.

Q I wish you would.

MR. NESSEN: I did not fully read the quotes from Congressman Rhodes, but I think my answer is the same as it was yesterday and the same as the President has given for any number of weeks in the past, which is that at the appropriate time he will recommend his choice to the convention.

Q Exactly. But, Mr. Rhodes, who spoke to him at some length yesterday, which was more than at least any of us on this side of the rostrum can claim, he now says that the President might let the convention do it.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the President's position on this is clear and that is at the appropriate time --

Q No, it is not. It apparently has gone the other way.

MR. NESSEN: Has it?

Q Rhodes was not lying, was he?

Q All you have to do is tell us that his position is unchanged from what he said. Is that correct, it is unchanged from what he said?

MR. NESSEN: The President's position?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The President's position is unchanged, of course. The President has said for weeks past he will recommend to the convention at the appropriate time his choice and that is what he will do.

Q And he would expect that to be accepted?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has been asked and answered that question.

Q Ron, he will not make that recommendation until he gets to the convention, right?

MR. NESSEN: At the appropriate time, but I don't have what the appropriate time is.

Q Ron, did the President in his conversation with Clarke Reed rule out any individual or groups for possible consideration as Vice President or are all his options still open?

MR. NESSEN: The President is in stage one of the process, Dick, as we talked about yesterday at tremendous length, and he is receiving the views of Members of Congress, delegates and leaders of the party.

Q You spoke so emphatically of stage one. What is stage two?

MR. NESSEN: I am not yet able to tell you what or when stage two goes into effect, but I will.

Q Were you able to check on whether or not there would be an FBI check?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten up to that point yet.

Q Ron, can you say whether there will be a stage two? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I can assure you that there will be a stage two.

MORE

Q Ron, when you talk about compatibility, Reagan has been criticized in some places for saying he would pick somebody who is compatible with him and that Schweiker is not. Since the President has described himself repeatedly as a moderate in the party, is there anybody ideologically that would not be compatible? Just in general, yes or no?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to go --

Q I am not asking you about individuals, but does he feel he could be compatible with any ideological element?

Q As long as he would not exclude any Republican, is he considering Senator Schweiker, of Pennsylvania?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to rule people in and out at this stage of the game.

Q At one time or another, he has mentioned -- I think once -- he listed eight people as possible running mates. Is it his view that the eight that he listed, that he named, are each of them compatible with him on the major domestic and foreign policy issues?

MR. NESSEN: All I can tell you is that the person the President chooses will be as he said, compatible on major foreign and domestic issues, and personally, too.

Q Just to clarify your answer to my question earlier, are you declining to comment on whether or not the President finds his current Vice President compatible?

MR. NESSEN: Now look, Phil, you have heard the President speak so often of his feelings about the Vice President and the kind of job the Vice President has done, and they are a team, and so forth. So, I don't think you need a story today saying that the White House refused to reiterate its feelings toward Rockefeller. I think they are very clear.

Q Then, Ron, everybody in the Republican Party is compatible. If we run all the way from Reagan on one side to Rockefeller on the other, who in the world can you imagine is not compatible? I think that is somebody else's question back there, Ron. Could you suggest somebody?

Q Ron, since you say the President is going to recommend his choice to the Convention, can we assume he will not feel free to recommend George Bush, given all the promises of the past?

MR. NESSEN: I forget what sort of arrangements or agreements were made at the time of the confirmation of Director Bush.

Q It is my recollection that Bush said he would not seek political office, but did not rule out the possibility of accepting it were it forced on him by the Convention. I believe the President promised, in effect, not to recommend George Bush as his running mate.

MR. NESSEN: I would like to look up what was said at the time.

Q It is right in the newspapers today, believe me, and that is exactly what was said, in quotes.

Q Does he stand by the letter he wrote to the Congress?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I have not gone around and asked the President, does he stand by this and does he stand by that. I have not heard him say he did not stand by it, but I don't check with him each day over a long list of things, "Do you stand by"?

Q Would you go and ask him if Bush is in the running, also? I would like to ask you why the President thinks he has a lot of support in Mississippi and what is his reaction to Clarke Reed's announcement?

MR. NESSEN: His reaction to Clarke Reed's announcement is that he is extremely pleased by it and that he appreciates the show of support.

As for the extent of the widespread support the President believes he has in Mississippi, I think, really, Jim Baker is the person who keeps track, delegate-by-delegate, and he could give you, I think, a more accurate breakdown.

Q Doesn't the President know what his support is in Mississippi? He has no idea of the delegate count in Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: I believe he has kept pretty well informed, but I don't know that Jim Baker comes running in every five minutes and says, "You have got one. You have lost one." That sort of thing.

Q But if the President knows, is it not possible that the President might share that with you?

MR. NESSEN: His belief is that he has widespread support in Mississippi.

Q Ron, did the President have any direct contact yesterday with Clarke Reed?

MR. NESSEN: He did. He called Clarke Reed and thanked him for his announcement of support.

Q When was that?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime late in the day, yesterday. I don't have the exact time.

Q Was this before Clarke Reed made public his statement?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure what time his statement was made public, but it was on the evening news shows, I think. I don't have the exact time of the call.

Q Let me pursue this. Could you give us a paraphrase of the conversation? Did he go beyond the support?

MR. NESSEN: He basically said what I just said to you, which really is a paraphrase of the conversation. He said he was extremely pleased and appreciated the show of support. That really was the basis of the conversation.

Q Did the President tell you what he thought this endorsement might mean for him in the Mississippi delegation?

MR. NESSEN: He did not, no.

Q Did he ask Clarke Reed what he thought it might mean for him?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't listen in on the conversation.

Q Ron, I seem to recall that Senator Schweiker, in February, made the statement, "I am for Ford right down the line." Now, I am wondering, in view of this defection, what is the President's reaction to Senator Schweiker? Does he look on this as sort of a form of betrayal or does he look on it as a valuable subtraction?

MR. NESSEN: Well, none of the above.

Q Then, what of the below? What is the President's reaction? Does he feel that this is an interesting development or dismaying, or is he delighted or what is the President's reaction to it?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, eadh day earlier this week, Rog Morton had a news conference and gave an appraisal from the point of view of the Ford campaign and beyond that, I don't have anything.

MORE

Q Ron, speaking of Senator Schweiker, can you open the Pennsylvania meeting this afternoon, in view of the defection or betrayal -- if the person was correct -- of Senator Schweiker?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think we will go ahead and have this one under the same ground rules as before.

Q Will you make the lawn available to the press?

MR. NESSEN: We have never closed the lawn, Saul, and if I recall right, after some of the meetings with delegations they have asked or on their own walked on out to the lawn and talked to whoever was there. I am certainly not going to stop anybody who wants to.

Q How many members have accepted, except Schweiker?

MR. NESSEN: He has resigned from the delegation, to my understanding. We will check.

Q Do you know how the President feels about the unit rule concept?

MR. NESSEN: What I tried to indicate before was that the question of when to vote and how to vote and so forth and how to present themselves to the convention, is really something that he is just not and does not intend to talk to the Mississippi delegation about. He feels that is their decision to make, their whole set of decisions to make.

Q Does the President agree with the convention rule adopted in 1972 outlawing the unit rule?

MR. NESSEN: John, I know I was asked that question the other day, and I have not gotten an answer for it, but I will explore it.

Q Ron, in view of Rhodes' comments about Bush and the President's letter to Senator Stennis when Bush was confirmed, can't you clarify whether Bush is being considered by the President as a possible running mate?

MR. NESSEN: You know I am going to get myself into a whole tangled area, Margaret, if I said, "Yes, he is; no, he is not." Then the next question is, "How about so and so? Well, you answered for Bush, why can't you answer for so and so?"

As I told Bob, I have no reason to believe there has been any change whatever in the letter that the President wrote to Stennis and in the statements that Bush himself made at the time.

Q Can you say that Bush is not being considered?

MR. NESSEN: If anybody sits down and writes a story today saying the White House ruled out George Bush today as a Vice Presidential running mate, I think it is a mistake. Bob raised the question, and I said I have no reason to think that anything said at the time of the Bush nomination confirmation has changed, but to turn that into a White House declaration today I think is a mistake.

Q Could you tell us how it is that people like Congressman Rhodes and others we encounter from time to time come away with all these statements that they were told by the President that don't jibe with your version? How is it that they get these impressions in meetings with the President? What takes place, do you suppose, that leads them to get what you later imply or at least infer or lead us to infer are erroneous impressions? Is the President trying to mislead them or are they bad auditors or what is the problem?

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

Q Ron, what is the estimated cost of this trip to Mississippi and will this come close to that limit that we have been reading about? In other words, I gather both sides are reaching that limit. How close is the Ford campaign? How many more trips does he propose until Kansas City, and will this deplete the amount?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the PFC bookkeepers are the ones who keep track of that.

Q You are not worried about this getting too close to that limitation?

MR. NESSEN: They are watching it over there, and I am sure they are aware of the ceiling.

Q In addition to Clarke Reed, has the President talked to anyone else in the last couple of days who has come out in support of him, except for Connally? Other than Connally and Reed?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of anybody.

Q Did he call Meldrim Thomson?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Does the President have anything to say about the Congressional action censuring Congressman Sikes?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is Congress' business.

Q Ron, did that inspection team that the President sent to Alaska to check on the pipeline situation ever return? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It did. They did, and, as I understand it, they reported to the ERC -- the Energy Resources Council -- which has been designated by the President to more or less coordinate the effort.

Q Can you tell us what they said? For example, are they satisfied the pipeline will be completed on schedule?

MR. NESSEN: I understand the departments involved have been putting out their own announcements of the steps.

Q Ron, why is it that the fact-finding trip was unveiled at the White House with great fanfare and then you sort of just let it drop?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we have let it drop. As I just said, the Energy Resources Council is coordinating the Government efforts to make sure that the contract arrangements are fulfilled before any oil is pumped through the pipe, but again, as I said yesterday, every announcement of every action by the Government does not come out of the White House in this Administration.

Q Has the United States had any response from Peking, from the Chinese Government, to its offer in principal of aid in the earthquake?

MR. NESSEN: Not yet.

Q No answer at all, one way or the other?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Who will the President take with him tomorrow to Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten the list yet, but I will give it to you. Maybe we can post it, in fact, before the day is over.

Q And there is no preparatory material before tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean in the way of remarks?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No, there is not.

Q What do you expect in the morning tomorrow? Anything of consequence?

MR. NESSEN: I would say it would not be necessary to come in here in the morning

Q Is his speech tonight considered political, Ron, or nonpolitical?

MR. NESSEN: This is the Republican Hispanic group. I don't know. I would not want to classify it one way or the other, John.

Q When will you know whether there will be a text or not?

MR. NESSEN: Later in the afternoon, say around four o'clock, we should have a pretty good idea.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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