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NEWS CONFERENCE

#558

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:05 A.M. EDT

AUGUST 12, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President's schedule remains unchanged today.

Incidentally, let me explain that I started a little early this morning so we could get through in time for the swine flu signing ceremony.

The Wholesale Price Index, as some of you probably know, came out this morning. It shows the Wholesale Price Index in July went up three-tenths of 1 percent. That is the third month in a row that there has been really only a moderate increase in the Wholesale Price Index. It was .4 in June and .3 in May. Obviously the President is pleased that the rate continues to rise at only a moderate rate. If you figure the annual rate, it is less than 4 percent.

I must tell you that within the figure there is a .7 percent increase, seven-tenths of 1 percent increase, in industrial prices, and that is a cause of some concern to the President, but his economic advisers have examined the underlying evidence, underlying statistics and find no evidence that there is growing pressure or any acceleration anticipated in the Wholesale Price Index.

I think you know that the President has sent George Bush down to give the second background or security briefing to Jimmy Carter today. I am still trying to clean up what I think are some perhaps misapprehensions about the briefing process. There is no big deal, but I notice occasionally written that Secretaries of State have always given these briefings before.

I can't find any evidence that any Secretary of State has ever given the briefing before. I do find that there is precedent for the President sending George Bush down. For instance, Eisenhower sent Alan Dulles to brief Kennedy during that campaign.

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Q Can you say once and for all whether it was Carter's idea for Bush or was it the President's?

MR. NESSEN: That is a good point, Helen.

Q Since you won't answer that --

MR. NESSEN: I will answer that. To my knowledge, it was the President's idea that George Bush would be the briefer.

Q From the Carter forces we understand that he asked for the CIA and not Kissinger.

MR. NESSEN: I really can't speak for the Carter forces. I think perhaps what happened was that Carter asked for a security or intelligence briefing and perhaps it has been interpreted as asking for a CIA or George Bush briefing. I think he asked for a briefing on national security and intelligence and so forth.

Q Will Kissinger give him a briefing at any point?

MR. NESSEN: It is not anticipated that he will.

Q Can I follow up that question, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q There is a transition team of Carter's that held a meeting. I think it was this week or last week. Have they asked to look over the facilities at the White House and, if they do, would they be allowed, considering the fact that he is being briefed on other things?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge they have not asked.

Q If they do ask, would they be allowed to?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I guess we will wait and see.

On Kansas City, there is not all that much detail I can add to what I said yesterday. As I said, the President will leave Washington about 4:00 p.m. our time. and get to Kansas City a little before 6:00 their time. It will be the Kansas City Municipal Airport.

There is not anticipated to be any sort of public arrival ceremony at the airport. There may be something like, for instance, Governor Bond may go out as a courtesy or Governor Bennett, perhaps Mary Louise Smith.

The President will not speak at the airport. In other words, there is basically no airport ceremony. It is expected that there will be a public welcoming ceremony at the Crown Center Hotel, which is the Ford hotel during the Convention week.

Q Inside or outside?

MR. NESSEN: Outside, as far as I know.

Q That might be logistically difficult for those of us on the buses to get up ahead in time to do that. Are you going to send in a bus early?

MR. NESSEN: From the airport?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: We can, if you would like that.

Q It might be better for some of us.

Q Ron, will he be making remarks there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, the President will have remarks at that little reception. There will be some of his supporters there. The supporters, in addition to delegate supporters and members of his team, will include the Vice President and Mrs. Rockefeller, Governor Milliken of Michigan and three of the Ford children, who will have gone on to Kansas City ahead of time. They are Susan, who I understand is visiting some friends in Topeka and will be driving over to Kansas City; Jack, who is going tomorrow, and Steve, who is coming from California on Sunday. Mike and Mike's wife, Gayle, will be coming from their home near Boston on August 17, which would be Tuesday.

The President, after this arrival ceremony and his remarks and so forth there in the Crown Center, will go up to his suite and, as I said yesterday, I expect him to remain in his suite. He will at that point assume personal command in the command post and begin to personally direct the activities of his forces there in Kansas City.

Q He will?

Q What will be his commissioned rank there?

Q Commander-in-Chief? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: As I said, there will be the sort of daily schedule I outlined yesterday of setting aside a number of hours in the morning for Presidential and White House business, probably lunch and afternoon time spent with various leaders, Governors, mayors, delegates and other leaders and then dinner --

Q Is that in the suite or is he going out to meet them elsewhere?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't worked out the exact details, but more likely in the suite.

Q I thought Rogers Morton was in command. Isn't he going to be in command of this operation out there?

MR. NESSEN: Of course Rog Morton is the President's campaign chairman, and Bill Timmons is his Convention coordinator, but all this week by telephone and next week directly and personally the President will take over personal command of the activities in Kansas City.

Q Is he going to see some delegates Sunday night?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is possible some people will come up and visit him in his suite Sunday night, but I don't have details of who they are and when they will arrive.

Q Is the phrase "command post" sort of a metaphor or is it a place?

MR. NESSEN: It is a place.

Q What is the place?

MR. NESSEN: It is an office on the same floor as his living quarters at the hotel.

Q Can you give us some physical description of it?

MR. NESSEN: There are lots of phones and desks.

Q How big is it?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to get you the exact details.

Q What floor?

MR. NESSEN: It is on the same floor as his living quarters.

Q What floor is that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we have indicated the floor because of security reasons.

Q You are not going to tell us? Surely you will tell people what floor the President is on.

Q Will we ever be able to get up there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there are any plans for the press to come up to the two floors.

Before going to Kansas City, the President is -- just to look forward to the next few days -- going to be spending time with his staff. He is continuing to work on his acceptance speech. He is continuing to spend time each day on his choice of a Vice Presidential running mate.

On Saturday, I don't look for any public appointments. That will be taken up with staff meetings. I wouldn't rule out the possibility of a golf game on Saturday afternoon, and I wouldn't rule out attendance at church services on Sunday morning before departure for Kansas City. I don't have these definite enough to say he will do them today, but I will before the weekend is over.

Q Ron, has ever an incumbent President, to your knowledge, gone to the Convention this early and taken personal command? Is there any precedent for this?

MR. NESSEN: I am not that much of an historian --

Q You don't know if any other President has ever done this, do you?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether they have or haven't. I am not that familiar with it. I know what the President's plans are in Kansas City, and that is what I tried to relay to you.

Q Will they have charts on the wall of delegates?

MR. NESSEN: They will have whatever they need there to successfully conclude the main purpose of the President's forces, at least, which is to win the nomination for the President.

Q Ron, does the President moving in to take personal command mean he has not been totally happy with the way things are going there?

MR. NESSEN: No. I said he has been directing operations in Kansas City by telephone and once he arrives on the scene he will take command in a personal way on the scene, but he has been running the Convention activities from here this week, but by telephone.

Q Will he be carrying a beeper when he leaves the suite and is going around Kansas City?

MR. NESSEN: For what purpose, Phil?

Q They have these beepers that everybody is being asked to carry, the Ford team has to carry these beepers. This communication system will it follow him?

MR. NESSEN: What would be the purpose of the President carrying one?

Q He has command of all of this. I wondered if the communications system would follow him?

MR. NESSEN: I think the beepers are intended for people who might go out to dinner or somewhere where they might be out of touch. But, I think it is fairly normal for those who need to reach the President to know where he is and for him to be in touch either through the White House phone system or radios carried by his aides.

I wouldn't think there would be any occasion when it wouldn't be known where the President was.

Q Can you give us an example of how the President has been directing operations out there this week by phone, just a couple of illustrations of what he has actually done?

MR. NESSEN: Basically, you know what the activities in Kansas City have been this week, mostly dealing with committee meetings, and he has been kept informed on what has happened in the subcommittee and the committee meetings and he has made the decisions of what course to take in those meetings.

Q What is the President's reaction today, his comments today on the Buckley boom, bubble or balloon?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is pretty much what I gave to some people who asked me yesterday. Perhaps I have a little more information today in the sense that there has been more time to do a little surveying and to look over our list of delegates, and we don't see any Ford delegates that would be switching over.

We do feel that if Senator Buckley is nominated -- I think that is an if -- but if he is, he would draw away delegates from Governor Reagan.

Q Ron, does the President have any reaction to the failure of the Platform Committee to put the ERA amendment on?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, my understanding is that that is not the Platform Committee decision, that that was done at a subcommittee level, that it is still an issue that is being debated.

The President favors the ERA, would like to see an ERA plank in the platform and perhaps this is an example of the kind of thing you were asking that he has directed by telephone that his people will make the effort to have an ERA plank in the platform.

Q While we are on the platform, Ron, there is a conservative block out there led by Jesse Helms that has been trying to get 14 specific items in the platform. Does the President have any thoughts on those as to whether he could live with them if for some reason they didn't get in?

MR. NESSEN: The platform is still being drafted. The subcommittees are meeting. The committee, I guess, will be meeting and then the full Convention will take it up. I think I can give a kind of generalized statement. I do think the platform as adopted -- it is up to the delegates to vote on what the shape of the platform will be and no doubt they will agree on a platform that reflects the principles of the Republican Party.

Q Are there any of those 14 that the President would flatly find unacceptable?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar myself with all the 14, but I know through this phone consultation process, and then starting Sunday personally, he is directing his forces out there who are dealing with the platform.

Q What about the ERA? Could I ask if the President feels as strongly as you suggest about the ERA? Would it be possible for him to direct his delegates to conduct a floor fight and get a plank in through a floor fight, and will the President do that?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, as I say, it is only at the subcommittee stage now, and he would like to see an ERA plank in the platform and has directed his people to make that effort. But, until even the committee vote, I think it is a little premature to talk about carrying it to the floor.

Q On that same subject, aides who have been working out there on the ERA are very pessimistic about the possibility of turning even the full committee around. Will the President consider making a personal appeal on this?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is a little premature, Fran. I think I have reflected to you his view and since it is in the subcommittee stage, I won't project what might occur.

Q Has the President given any instructions to his people out there on dealing with the Helms' package? I mean, he has given instructions on the ERA. You said that. Has he told them to resist, to wait, or what?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I am not familiar with all of the 14, or whatever the number is, but he does have his people working on the scene under his directions.

Q What are his directions?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you blanket directions. You know the point is that the President feels that the delegates will decide on a platform that reflects Republican principles.

Q Does the President feel the one delegate who --

Q What is that, Fran?

Q Usry, who switched over to vote against the ERA and Ford representatives, it is reported, did not make a strong appeal to him not to switch from the Ford point of view.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. The subcommittee action, I am not totally familiar with the mechanics of it, but I have tried to indicate what the President's view is.

Q Was the President surprised on the Buckley move? I mean, Reagan said "gosh."

MR. NESSEN: The President didn't say "gosh."

Q How does the President really interpret this? Does he interpret Buckley as a stalking horse for Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you read what John Sears has said, John Sears said they didn't have anything to do with it. Helms has, it seems to me, pursued a somewhat independent course out there in terms of offering some platform planks that apparently were not part of the Reagan strategy now being involved with a Presidential candidate who is a rival of Reagan's.

Q He was a Reagan supporter, was he not?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly was, but I think these two things have to raise questions about whether Reagan's conservative supporters are wandering away.

Q Is that the interpretation the President puts on it?

MR. NESSEN: It certainly raises that question.

Q Let me ask you about the survey that has been taken regarding erosion of the President's strength in the wake of this Buckley thing. Have the State Chairmen polled their delegations and reported that there has been no erosion?

MR. NESSEN: Some have. I think perhaps the place where the most attention has been focused, at least by the press, has been in New York State and, if I read Dick Rosenbaum's findings correctly, he did poll his delegation and he found none of the Ford delegates had indicated they would shift to Buckley.

On the other hand, I forget how many he counted, but there was some indication from the Reagan delegates of New York were at least thinking of shifting to Buckley. New York would be the place, I would think, because it is Buckley's home State, where his candidacy would have the most impact. Yet, Dick Rosenbaum's findings, if I read them right, is that there has been no wavering among Ford delegates in New York State.

Q What about the State with uncommitted, like Mississippi? Has Clarke Reed reported that there is no change?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely. Our count of the President's strength in Mississippi has been growing steadily over the past couple of weeks.

Q What does it amount to, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I would say a little more than two weeks ago the conclusion was reached that the President had a majority in the Mississippi delegation. I see now there is independent confirmation of that, I believe by UPI and by CBS. So, the President does and has felt for a couple of weeks now that he has a majority in the Mississippi delegation.

Q That has not shifted in the wake of the Buckley announcement?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge there has been no shift of any Ford delegates and there is not anticipated to be any as a result of a possible Buckley candidacy.

Q Ron, has anybody named these that they think is the majority? Have they enumerated or named any of these?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, there is now independent confirmation by at least two news organizations of our own conclusions and as far as I know, this was done by asking 60 people in Mississippi who do you favor.

Q Nobody has named them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how you can call them up and ask them if you don't know what their names are.

Q Has anybody in the White House talked to Rosenbaum about this situation?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure there has been contact with Dick Rosenbaum.

Q Has there been contact with Rosenbaum since the Buckley announcement with the Mississippi delegation.

MR. NESSEN: I am sure there has. I don't know whether from here or from Kansas City, but I am sure there has been contact.

Q Ron, since Buckley was reported to have been asked to compile data in case he is picked for the Vice Presidential running mate, do you know if any of the President's people have talked to him personally in the last 48 hours?

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

Q The President has not?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he has not.

Q Buckley says he wants to free up, whatever that may mean, the delegates. Does the President think the delegates have had a choice in this?

MR. NESSEN: They have had a pretty good choice now for about eight months. I thought that was what the last eight months had been about, to give the delegates a choice.

Q Cliff White, one of the President's strategists, was Jim Buckley's campaign manager in New York and is still very close to him. Do you know if Cliff White has been asked by any of the Ford Committee people to discuss this with Buckley or present any views to Buckley or find out anything from Buckley?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he has, Rudy. He is working very hard in Kansas City for the President.

Q He still is?

MR. NESSEN: I know for a fact he is working in Kansas City for the President.

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Q Is the President seeing any Republican Members of Congress this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: You may be thinking of Senator Curtis, who has had asked for some time with the President today to bring in some constituents of his who want to discuss with the President -- it is actually Senator Curtis and Congresswoman Virginia Smith, both Republicans from Nebraska, who have asked for a chance to bring in -- and I think Senator Dole was also part of this request, but he won't be there, himself. They want to bring in some constituents from that area to present or discuss with the President their view of some legal matters that affect them.

Q Wasn't this the beef cattlemen?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the matters they want to discuss with the President.

Q Are these delegates?

MR. NESSEN: No, they are constituents --

Q They are cattlemen, aren't they?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if they are cattlemen, but I know cattle are one of the items they want to discuss.

Q Do they control these delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I think this is entirely separate. It has nothing to do with delegates.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: 2:30.

Q Do you have any recent assessments on the impact of Reagan naming Schweiker?

MR. NESSEN: I have the Post's amusing side-by-side display of the two polls.

Q I want to know which of those two is in line with the President's view of the Schweiker nomination now?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by "now." The President's view of that has never changed.

Q Did it hurt Reagan by naming Schweiker?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure he puts that negative twist on it. The President has felt he had sufficient votes to win the nomination on the first ballot before Reagan named Schweiker as his running mate, and the naming of Schweiker has not caused any net loss, or perhaps one delegate net loss to the President.

Q The question I'm leading up to is, it was generally assumed Schweiker was a monumental faux pas on Reagan's part, and I wonder why the President has not been able to capitalize on that more substantially than he has. It seems if Reagan committed that monumental of a faux pas, the President should immediately after that been able to say we have locked up the Convention. But you have not gotten to that point yet, according to everything I read out of Kansas City.

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree with you. I think you are looking in the wrong direction. The President had more than enough delegates to win the nomination on the first ballot and that remains the case today. So, I don't know --

Q You declared the nomination locked up yesterday afternoon. Isn't that when it happened?

MR. NESSEN: I think Jim Baker announced about three weeks ago, at the time the delegates committed to the President reached 1,135, about three weeks ago, that would be the occasion when our delegate count exceeded the number needed to nominate the President.

Q If it was 1,135 three weeks ago, why the wining and dining of delegates beyond that?

MR. NESSEN: I think I indicated before that the President wants -- I think the expression I used before was the President wants to win the nomination not with just a bare majority, but he wants to have a large majority as part of his effort at party unity, and to go to the fall campaign with a united party.

Q What is to be done with these 4,500 or more responses? How are they going to be handled?

MR. NESSEN: They are continuing to be tabulated and reported to the President. Do you mean what will happen to them after --

Q I mean, are they all added up one by one? Is more weight attached to some than others?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think more weight is attached to some than others. I think the purpose is to make the President aware of the views of the delegates in the other categories, and that is being done.

Q Will the President choose the high vote getter?

MR. NESSEN: I have indicated he would not necessarily choose the high vote getter.

Q Has the President talked or considered talking to the Attorney General about the question of the Roselli murder, and whether the Government forces should get into an investigation of it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he has been involved in it. I think the Justice Department has reached a conclusion, from what I understand.

Q How do you know that?

MR. NESSEN: That is what I read in the paper.

Q Was there a conclusion?

MR. NESSEN: I thought they said -- I will have to check and see what they said.

Q I thought the Attorney General was still considering that?

MR. NESSEN: If that is the case --

Q The President evidenced no interest in it or has taken no role in finding out anything about it?

MR. NESSEN: It is a matter for the Attorney General.

Q Does the President seriously believe the apparent murder of Mr. Roselli, following the apparent murder of Mr. Giancana, were simply local Illinois and Florida homicides?

MR. NESSEN: As I told Fran, the Attorney General is handling the matter.

Q Could you take the question and ask the President? This is the question: As I understand it, Giancana was the first subpoenaed witness before a Congressional committee who was ever murdered before he could testify. Could you take the question?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, Les, that is a matter that the Attorney General will be looking into.

Q I would like to know what the President thinks. Would you take the question, Ron? Thank you.

Q With the Republican Platform Subcommittee supporting a plank on the Constitutional amendment against abortion and the President going on record against such a Constitutional amendment, can President Ford run on such a platform?

MR. NESSEN: I think you are way ahead of yourself. For one thing, as I understand it, that issue is still being dealt with at the subcommittee level. No particular stand has been taken on the abortion issue by the Platform Subcommittee or the full Convention.

Q If it was, would he reconcile his differences?

MR. NESSEN: I can't deal with a "what if" question, because the platform is still being written.

Q Can I ask a question on the wholesale price index, please?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Jim.

Q The .7 rise in the industrial component, which annualizes at about 8.4 percent, are the President's economic advisers concerned about that? This is a hefty rise in the industrial prices.

MR. NESSEN: I think if you look into that, Jim, I think you will see that the rise is caused almost entirely by petroleum prices. You know that was certainly anticipated and is based at least in part on continuing dependence on the OPEC oil and the OPEC countries' ability to raise oil prices at will, and really underlines the President's continuing feeling that Congress needs to pass the legislation he has proposed, which will lead to independence from overseas oil reducers.

Q You don't know how much of it was oil? What the percentage was?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, but a good deal of it was based on high oil prices.

Q Let me ask in a more general way. Industrial prices, even without oil, have continued to rise, both on wholesale and retail measurement, at a time when plants were operating at only about two-thirds of their capacity. So you have a continuing rise in industrial prices when there has not been a strong recovery in demand.

Is there any concern about this?

MR. NESSEN: No, on two points: One, that particular component of the index, the rise in it, was mostly in petroleum prices. Secondly, Alan Greenspan and the others have examined that to see whether there is anything there that is a signal of the beginning of a new acceleration in prices, and they don't see that it is.

Q Ron, in the past couple of days, Clarence Kelley has indicated publicly, some frustrations he is having in trying to get to the bottom and get things cleaned out at the FBI. I am wondering if the President has had any communication with him to give him his support and to tell him to go after this thing and get it cleaned out, even if some FBI agents have to be indicted?

MR. NESSEN: I will check and see whether he has been in communication with Clarence Kelley.

Q What about Kissinger? Will there be any formal report?

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

Q In line with Phil's question, does the President believe FBI agents who break the law by burglarizing someone should be prosecuted?

MR. NESSEN: Since Clarence Kelley is working on the problems he sees in the FBI, I don't think it is proper for me to make a generalized statement along that line when he is dealing with some specific --

Q The President is sworn to uphold the law. Now, if the agents burglarize, doesn't the President think they should be prosecuted? Why should you prosecute a common crook if you don't prosecute FBI agents?

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(At 11:40 A.M. EDT)