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

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:10 P.M. EDT

AUGUST 13, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any news today actually, so maybe we can keep it short.

Q Can you give us the check-in time?

MR. NESSEN: Check-in time for the press is at 3:15 at Andrews and the press plane departs at 3:45.

Q 3:45? That's only 15 minutes before the President.

MR. NESSEN: No, the President has been backed up a little bit. The President leaves the South Lawn by helicopter at 4:20, and leaves Andrews on Air Force One at 4:40. The press plane arrives in Kansas City at the Municipal Airport at 5:25, central time, and the President arrives in Kansas City at 5:55, central time.

We did call ahead to the advance people and in response to some requests, we will have at least one press bus going to the Crown Center early so you can get in place. You can decide on the spot whether you want to go in early or wait and ride in with the motorcade.

Let me say, these are tentative times. I don't anticipate any change, but you might want to call the recording machine tomorrow to find out if all the times hold.

Q What is the latest recording machine number? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: You can just look it up in Parade magazine. (Laughter) We will give you that.

We don't plan to put out a bible for the trip. What we will do is put out the President's schedule on a daily basis, as we do here.

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For Sunday, as I say, I don't expect the President to go out of the hotel Sunday night. He may have some visitors Sunday night, and I will tell you that when we get there.

Q Does he have a prepared speech for Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: He will have arrival remarks at the Crown Center, but I don't think I will have them in advance, Helen.

Q What is the President's view of the ERA plank?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it is what I said yesterday, that he had indicated to his people out there that he would like to have an ERA plank in the platform.

Q Is he happy, then, with --

MR. NESSEN: Helen, we have not got a platform yet. I don't think we want to go through the platform plank-by-plank and say he doesn't like that one, or he likes that one. He has his folks out there working on the platform.

Q Ron, is he aware of reports that delegates, particularly from Maine and Mississippi, but perhaps from some other States as well, are now asking him to exclude certain Vice Presidential possibilities or they will perhaps not support him on the first ballot? Is he aware of that fight that seems to be going on?

MR. NESSEN: I understand Jim Baker had a news conference out in Kansas City that ended, perhaps an hour ago, and I think he probably addressed all those rumors and reports that are swirling around out there, and I don't think I can add anything to Jim's comments.

Q Baker said he thought the President would lose, on the first round, six or seven Maine delegates unless he came out and said Connally was out of consideration, and the question to you is, is Connally still under consideration on the President's list?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't read Jim Baker as having said that, Tom. To my knowledge, he didn't say that.

Q Has there been any change in Connally's status?

MR. NESSEN: As far as we can tell, there has been no erosion of the President's delegate strength. He has enough now to win on the first ballot. We expect he will win on the first ballot, and that is even without counting any of the uncommitted delegates. The President will win. He has enough now to win on the first ballot, and we have not seen any erosion.

As for the Vice Presidential process, that process is underway and I don't have anything to add or take away from what I have said before.

Q How far is it along now?

MR. NESSEN: It is moving along.

Q When is phase three going to be announced?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that we will spell out really very much more about the process until it is time to announce it.

Q Then, we have to assume that the President will be seeing these various potential candidates in Kansas City, right?

MR. NESSEN: Why would you assume that?

Q Because I would assume the President would want to meet personally with anyone he is seriously thinking of as being his running mate, is that wrong?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to fine-tune the description of the process that we have put out, Helen. It is going forward and it will be announced when the President has made his decision.

Q Can you tell us about the data they were asked to get together? Has the White House actually received it from all 15, 20 or whatever, more than a dozen people?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't really have anything to add to the Vice Presidential selection process.

Q Are they just still standing there in their homes holding on to it, or is the President going to get it, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I think we probably won't say much more about this now until it is time to announce the name.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: It is underway. The person is going to be selected and announced, and then I am sure you will want a reconstruction of how he was selected, which we will help you with. In the meanwhile, I am not going to say much of anything further.

Q I would like to ask a specific question. Has anyone from the White House, the President Ford Committee or the President's campaign staff at all requested to see a copy of the transcript or any portions of the transcript of John Connally's bribery trial?

MR. NESSEN: I told you about a week ago, Walt, that I would not discuss specific procedures for checking out the qualifications of specific people, and I am going to stick to that.

Q Ron, has the President made a decision yet?

MR. NESSEN: He has not.

Q The President asked a number of people, a score or thereabout, all of whom seem to have nothing in common, except that they are over 35.

MR. NESSEN: I disagree. What they have in common is exactly what I said they have in common when we announced the process, and that is they have all been recommended to the President as people who should be considered. That is their common trait, and that is how they got on the list.

Q My point is this: The President said he wants a middle-of-the-roader, but he has gone from one end to the other of the political spectrum on that list.

MR. NESSEN: As I say again, the one thing that all those people -- we haven't named any names from here, but I know you have done a lot of work and the one thing that all those people have in common whom I have seen named in the papers, is that they were recommended to the President for consideration as his running mate.

Q By whom?

MR. NESSEN: By some of these 5,000 or so Republicans whose views were solicited and some whose views were not solicited.

Q Have you tallied up those letters yet?

MR. NESSEN: I peeked in there this morning and the counting had not been finished yet. It is still going on.

Q Will you tell us anything about what they know about it so far?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Who is counting?

MR. NESSEN: The staff people assigned to do it.

Q Has the general public been sending in their suggestions?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, there has been some of those.

Q In any particular volume?

MR. NESSEN: Not in any particular volume and no candidate has any particular lead in the public --

Q If any of these on the list refused to disclose their financial holdings, would that eliminate them from contention?

MR. NESSEN: If who has?

Q If any on the President's list, any of the various names mentioned by the President and others refused to disclose their financial --

MR. NESSEN: Tom, when we announced the process, somebody said, what happens if they refuse to make the commitment the President requests of them?

Q That is what I am asking again.

MR. NESSEN: The answer is the same as before. They would not be further considered if they declined to make that commitment.

Q Ron, is the President interested in people who those 5,000 Republicans consider would not be qualified to be Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean by that?

Q It is the same question I tried to asked before and did not seem to get anywhere with. But basically, there are a number of names that seem to be unacceptable to Republican delegates who support the President. Is he interested in hearing about the unacceptable candidates?

MR. NESSEN: I think he can read the paper, Bob.

Q Well, I assume he can, too. That is not what I asked. Is he paying any attention to what those people from Maine and other areas say about unacceptable delegates or candidates?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, there is just no use in going much further on this because I don't have anything to say about the Vice Presidential process today.

Q Ron, you said a minute ago that the President said he wants a middle-of-the-roader, and you said the one thing the people have in common is that they have been recommended. So, it seems what you are saying is that the White House does not pretend that all the people on the list are middle-of-the-roads. Is that fair to say?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to say on that today.

Q What has the President done today on politics?

MR. NESSEN: On politics?

Q Yes.

Q Or anything.

MR. NESSEN: He has had a lot of staff meetings since 8 o'clock and he is being kept informed of developments in Kansas City.

Q Has he been on the telephone personally to any delegates?

MR. NESSEN: He has not, to my knowledge.

Q According to the Post story, he reassured Clarke Reed yesterday he would not choose a running mate who was not compatible with the views of the Mississippi delegation. Would he make a similar reassurance to the Maine delegation, to the Maine Republicans that he is not going to select anyone who is not compatible with them or is he just singling out Mississippi for special treatment?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, there is nothing new on this. We can beat this thing to death, but I have nothing new to say today. Everything to be said up to now, has been said.

Q In that case, I would like to go to the transcript of your briefing on August 10, which contains your statement that Father McKenzie said, "Yes, that sounds fine," after you told him what you said. When I read Father McKenzie's transcript of what you said, he said, as follows: "I did not say 'Gee, that sounds fine to me.' Mr. Nessen said that he works on the principle of not clarifying what the President said. I wonder why Mr. Nessen is unable or afraid to clarify whether the President meant abortion."

MR. NESSEN: I think I can probably deal with Father McKenzie myself, Les, and just get the middleman out of it.

Q I dealt with him, Ron, and I read the transcript word-for-word and they took a recording on it, Ron, and I would like to know why you told everyone --

MR. NESSEN: A recording on it?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: A taped conversation?

Q Yes, with my permission.

MR. NESSEN: Heavy stuff.

Q You think this is funny.

I would just like to know why did you tell everyone in this room that he said, "Gee, that sounds fine," when he did not say that?

MR. NESSEN: Les, as I said, I will deal directly with Cardinal Krol's office, without the middleman.

Q If I could go further, the transcript of your briefing on February 3 shows the following on page 11. The question was: "In the interest of precision, are we going to get the President's exact views on this matter" -- that is, of abortion -- "or do we have to depend on your interpretation of the President's words?"

"Mr. Nessen: You will have to depend on my interpretation, Carl, which I carefully checked with him to make sure it is accurate."

Why, if you have done it there, do you tell us you don't elaborate? Why did you tell them up there you don't elaborate on the President's words when you did it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: You got me, Les.

Q Did the President ask you to stonewall on this?

MR. NESSEN: I think everything is pretty clear, Les.

Q No, no, it isn't. That is why I asked the question. Did the President ask you to make no comment on abortion?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is all pretty clear, Les.

Q Ron, on the Vice Presidential again, you did say earlier, I think, that you would tell us something about the selection process after he announces?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I am sure there will be interest in it and I am sure we can help provide --

Q I don't know why you leave us up in the air.

Q The question is, are you going to let us know how this delegate poll came out?

MR. NESSEN: I think we said from the beginning we would not because the purpose of it was not to provide a survey of sentiment of winners or losers or ranking from the 5,000 or so people who were solicited. But rather the purpose was to provide advice and recommendations to the President. So, it is serving its purpose. The purpose was not to make a public announcement.

Q Wouldn't it be fair to show them what they have done, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think they know what they have done, Les. They wrote the letters.

Q What the whole group of them have done, otherwise, doesn't it suggest that it is simply the President asked them to do this and then totally disregarded and keeps a secret what they have done?

MR. NESSEN: We went through that about two weeks ago, Les.

Q I am asking again. We all have to ask or we don't get answers.

MR. NESSEN: I will dig out the transcript and show it to you.

Q Isn't it correct that phase three will be the announcement itself?

MR. NESSEN: I think there will be a period of examining the qualifications of some of those recommended.

Q That is going on now in phase two, isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to spell out any further the process until we reconstruct it afterwards.

Q Let me rephrase my question, then. Will there be a step that is completely separate and distinct from what is going on now?

MR. NESSEN: I think we will spell it out or reconstruct it afterward, Russ, but I don't have anything further to say on the Vice Presidential process.

Q Ron, if the President meets with a candidate in Kansas City, will we be aware of it? Will you let us know?

MR. NESSEN: We are going to put out, I think, pretty full schedules of the President's activities.

Q Could I go back to this consultation of the 5,000-plus Republican delegates and others? You were asked a question a minute ago. You were asked two weeks ago, and I don't want to repeat that question, about whether or not we would ever know, whether or not you would put out the results. But in the event the person the President finally chooses did very well in that consultation process, was first or second or ranked quite high, wouldn't you expect the President to refer to that in announcing his choice and refer to that as one of the reasons why he had done it?

Would you not expect him to make some reference to the fact that this man or this person had the backing of a very substantial number of Republican delegates and so on as a strengthening, if you will, of this person's qualifications?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. Obviously, the statement in announcing his choice isn't written yet because he has not made his choice yet.

Q I am asking what you personally would expect?

MR. NESSEN: I personally would expect that the grand total of who won and who came in second and so forth will not be --

Q I am not asking that. I am asking if the person ranked high or did very well, wouldn't you expect the President to refer to that fact in some way?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. The statement is not written yet. The guy is not chosen yet, or woman.

Q Will the announcement be the same timing?

MR. NESSEN: The traditional timing, which is after his own nomination.

I don't expect the President to make his final decision until after he gets the nomination.

Q When will that be, Wednesday night?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q How many replies have you had so far?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I peeked in this morning. They were still going through letters, so I don't think we have a count.

Q Ron, have we replied to the Russian's latest proposal or counter-proposal on SALT?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, we have not.

Q Has the President finished his acceptance speech?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is working on it this afternoon.

Q To go further with John's question, do you expect that reply to go by any chance, let's say, before Wednesday night, before the balloting for the President's nomination?

MR. NESSEN: Before Wednesday night or after Wednesday night, it will be unrelated to Wednesday night. It will be when the President has made his decisions on what position to take in our response.

Q How close is he, would you say?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, I don't know.

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Q What substantive nonpolitical matters is the President occupied with these days?

MR. NESSEN: I guess some of the same ones you are. He has a fair number of bills that have come down from Congress before it left for its recess. He needs to make a decision on whether to sign those or veto those, so he is working on that.

Q Which would be the major ones?

MR. NESSEN: FEA, there is a large highway bill that has to be decided on, and Margaret can get us a more complete list, but it is a fairly good number of bills that came down.

Q Is he going to try to get all that done before he leaves for Kansas City?

MR. NESSEN: He will get done what he can and the rest he will take with him and work on it out there.

Q Will any Cabinet travel with him Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen the manifest, Helen. We will get it for you. I think most of the Cabinet is going ahead.

Q Ron, do you anticipate the President returning to Washington on Sunday the 29th?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have an exact return date yet, Russ.

Q Can you tell us anything about what the President and Kissinger discussed last night?

MR. NESSEN: Mostly it was a report by Henry on his trip and also some other foreign policy developments.

Q Like Lebanon? Did they talk about Lebanon, the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't sit in on the meeting, so I don't know all the subjects covered, but there were some other matters discussed.

Q Do you know what the President is primarily concerned about in the foreign area right now? Is he paying particular attention to South Africa, or Lebanon, or to this Greek-Turkish thing in the Aegean? Is there something that is consuming a lot of his time, or formulating a reply on SALT, or finding out about these underground nuclear explosions?

MR. NESSEN: I think all of those things are on his agenda.

Q Give us a choice of three.

Q What is he doing this weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have his exact schedule. I would say the outlook is still as I told you yesterday, which is the possibility of golf tomorrow and church on Sunday. He will work here in the office tomorrow.

Q What did the President and Vice President talk about yesterday afternoon at the regular weekly meeting?

MR. NESSEN: What they normally talk about is the work of the Domestic Council.

Q Did they discuss anything in particular in the political area?

MR. NESSEN: The two were in there together, Jim --

Q You said what they normally discuss. You didn't say what they discussed yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: I told Jim I didn't attend the meeting. It was a private meeting between the two of them.

Q Might there not have been a little more politics than Domestic Council?

MR. NESSEN: There might well have been. I don't know. There might not have been either.

Q Ron, a housekeeping question, please. The custom whereby these briefings are not allowed to be broadcast or filmed and that the transcript of these meetings are not allowed to be reproduced, or Xeroxed, I was wondering, is that the decision of the President or is that your decision?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a tradition.

Q Right, but the President -- it has always been a policy?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I remember.

Q Would you be willing to allow an exception to this so this particular briefing could be reproduced as an example of the open Ford White House?

MR. NESSEN: Some of the bills the President is considering that came down from the Hill include the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation --

Q Did he sign that?

MR. NESSEN: It is one of the things he is deciding. -- a bill dealing with pesticide control, the appropriation for the Transportation Department, the FEA extension -- does the Transportation appropriation include the highway bill? The highway funds are in the Transportation bill. That is a very important bill. That is some of the legislation here, and awaiting his decision.

Q Ron, is he considering going to Seattle, I believe it is, around the 24th for the American Legion Convention?

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

Q Do you know if he is considering that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know one way or the other.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:33 P.M. EDT)