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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 11:10 A.M. CDT

AUGUST 18, 1976

WEDNESDAY

(Kansas City, Missouri)

MR. NESSEN: Let me, first of all, tell you two things that are somewhat unrelated to the Convention.

I think some of you know that Senator Jake Garn's wife was killed in a car crash.

Q Who?

MR. NESSEN: Senator Jake Garn, of Utah. His wife was killed in a car crash. The President sent a telegram of condolence and sent flowers to Senator Garn and about 30 minutes ago, telephoned Senator Garn and reached him in Bloomfield, Colorado, to express his condolences. Senator Garn's wife's name was Hazel and she was killed in a car wreck in Nebraska the day before yesterday, I believe.

The other matter has to do with a story you may have seen on the wires, or heard, concerning the death of two American officers around Panmunjon, and I would like to make a statement on behalf of the President concerning that.

"The President condemns the vicious and unprovoked murder of two American officers last night in the demilitarized zone near Panmunjon, in Korea. These officers were peacefully supervising a work detail in the neutral zone when they were subjected to a brutal and cowardly attack totally without warning. The total responsibility for the consequences of these murders rests with the North Korean Government."

That is the end of my statement. I will tell you, additionally, that the United States is seeking a meeting immediately of the Military Armistice Commission in Korea. I understand that the State Department also has further information and the President is being kept informed of developments by his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft.

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Q Ron, what are the consequences?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, I think, at this point, all I can say is that there are meetings being held in Washington on the situation and I don't, at this time, have anything further on it.

Q Ron, is it the belief of the President and the U.S. Government that this was a deliberate connection with the nonaligned meeting in Sri Lanka and the attacks were evidence of the North Korean's desire to get us off the Korean peninsula?

MR. NESSEN: The Embassy, in its initial assessment, has been unable to determine the motive of the attacks.

Q That was in Seoul?

MR. NESSEN: In Seoul, correct.

The President's schedule you have is unchanged.

Q Excuse me. Before you go further, I would like to ask a question about a line in the President's statement, the "total responsibility for the consequences of these murders rests with the North Korean Government." Can you elaborate on what that means?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Walt. I think the language speaks for itself. The first step we are taking is to seek an immediate meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, as well as meetings going on now in Washington by American officials, on the situation.

Q When was the President informed, and by whom?

MR. NESSEN: He was informed as soon as the word came this morning, by Brent Scowcroft.

Q Does the President feel that these attacks underscore the need for a continued American military presence in South Korea and the need not to reduce the number of American troops there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I am going to go into a very lengthy discussion of that now, John, other than to give you this statement.

Q What is the purpose of the meeting called in Panmunjon, to demand an explanation?

MR. NESSEN: You mean a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have precisely what presentation the United States will make at that meeting, but the State Department probably will.

Q Who were the two officers, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the details here, Les.

Q Have they been identified by anybody?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, you will have to check at the State Department.

Q Is anyone checking from here?

MR. NESSEN: I know that Brent was on the phone with Washington.

The President's schedule is unchanged for the day, so far. He slept in just a little later than normal this morning and had breakfast at 7:30.

He arose just shortly before that. He had breakfast alone, incidentally, contrary to all the little things I have been reading.

Then, the first activity that he had was the PFC staff meeting here on the third floor, which I think some of you covered.

Other than that, I don't really have anything.

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Q About the schedule, could you please tell us if that noon trip, the 12:30 trip is all pool coverage, and tell us which events the rest of the day are pool coverage as opposed to those which aren't? Is there any open coverage on the President's schedule today?

MR. NESSEN: It is all travel pool coverage.

Q Ron, has the President heard from the Secretary of State on the subject of the international morality plank?

MR. NESSEN: I know there was a good deal of discussion last night, and the President made his decision that his plank really simply stated the basic principles on which the American foreign policy has been based.

Q Did he talk to Secretary Kissinger about it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure whether the President talked to him directly. I know the Secretary's views were brought into the discussion.

Q Is there going to be a pool allowed in to watch the President during the nominating tonight?

MR. NESSEN: We are working on that and haven't really finalized the plans yet. I hope so.

Q Aside from this light schedule listed, what else is the President doing today?

MR. NESSEN: He has two major projects, as you know, and one is to select his Vice Presidential running mate. The other is to work further on his acceptance speech.

Q Can you tell us the running mate yet?

MR. NESSEN: He has not chosen a running mate.

Q Is he going to see Reagan tonight?

MR. NESSEN: As I said before, the President would like to see Governor Reagan after the nomination and that could very well be tonight, but it also could be tomorrow morning. There hasn't been a time fixed yet.

Q Could you give us a rundown on the President's meeting with the Governors?

MR. NESSEN: I was in another meeting at the time and didn't attend. I know the intention was to talk about party business, about the fall campaigning and hear their views on the Vice Presidential question and I came in sort of at the end of it, and I know that they indicated, as they were sort of breaking up, that the President had not given any kind of indication who he was considering.

Q One of the Governors said there was a great deal of talk by the Governors, not the President, about the selection or the possibilities of him selecting Ronald Reagan as his running mate.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I was in another meeting and I didn't attend the meeting today.

Q Ron, how will he go about the process of choosing? Will the possible candidate come in and see him or will he talk to them on the phone?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for that. Some of the Governors who were in this morning have been mentioned by the great mentioners as possible contenders but there is no plan to have people come in and be interviewed and so forth today. I would look for the President to make his decision either late tonight or tomorrow morning, and I would look for the announcement to be made possibly around the noon hour tomorrow.

Q Here?

MR. NESSEN: Here, yes.

Q What will he do today to refine his process of making his selection?

MR. NESSEN: Think.

Q Will the President make his own announcement on that subject?

MR. NESSEN: Will the President come here and announce his running mate?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: That is my anticipation.

Q In this room?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, he indicated he was going to see people today.

MR. NESSEN: That he was going to see Vice Presidential possibilities today?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: That is not on the schedule and not anticipated as far as I know.

Q Who is he seeing today?

MR. NESSEN: Aside from this schedule, I know of nobody who is coming in in addition to the schedule.

Q Did Senator Baker go up to the 18th floor yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Did Senator Baker go up to the 18th floor yesterday?

Q Did he, or did he not?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he did. I will check, but he didn't see the President.

Q Ron, is the President still going to make his decision only after he meets with Mr. Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Tell us some of the things President Ford will be doing after he returns from the Muehlebach Hotel and before he goes to the New Jersey delegation? He has about a four-hour time period on his schedule that is absolutely blank.

MR. NESSEN: One thing he will do is eat lunch. The three other things he will be doing are, one, work on his acceptance speech; thinking about his Vice Presidential choice; and doing anything that has to be done in connection with this North Korean episode.

Q Ron, now that the test vote has been made and you have won on that, and you have no doubt you will win the nomination, don't you think in the interest of party unity Ronald Reagan ought to consider dropping out of the race at this point?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, you know we are going to go and have the rest of the Convention in the scheduled way, and you know the ball game isn't over until the last out and the President feels that way.

Q Ron, can you tell about that?

MR. NESSEN: We are not taking anything for granted.

Q At what point exactly was the President informed of the assassination of the two officers?

MR. NESSEN: I said the first thing this morning by Brent Scowcroft.

Q Do you expect the President to announce the Vice Presidential candidate tomorrow or is it something you might do?

MR. NESSEN: I mentioned to Andy I thought the President would come here and would announce it.

Q If the President has not made up his mind when he goes to see Reagan, what will he consult with him about?

MR. NESSEN: He will consult with Governor Reagan about the Vice Presidency.

Q What will he do, present him a list and say who do you like?

MR. NESSEN: They will discuss the Vice Presidency.

Q Ron, can you comment on the amount of input Ronald Reagan will have on the President's final decision?

MR. NESSEN: I can't quantify for you, Russ. He will consult with Reagan about the Vice Presidency.

Q If he had in mind a particular man Reagan was absolutely and totally opposed to, would that cause the President to change?

MR. NESSEN: That is too speculative, Russ, for me to answer.

Q Is Senator Baker still in the running?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't said who is in the running and who is not in the running.

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Q There are some reports that the President has gotten sort of a special communication.

MR. NESSEN: I read the list, Helen, and there is a list of five people out based on the reports. There was a list of four people out and three of the people on the list of five are not on the list of four.

Q There was a list of four in Jack Anderson's column.

MR. NESSEN: I forget how Jack worded it, but the fact is that the so-called reports, and then there is a list of two, and then there is a way, I am told--one story is that if a certain thing happens, it will be one of those two. If another thing happens, it is another one of those two. The fact is, the only person who knows who is on the list, whether the list has been narrowed down or not, is the President. He has told no one, absolutely no one. I can assure you of that.

I know of one gentleman going around town telling people he knows who the President has selected and that gentleman has seen the President for a total of 30 seconds this week and they didn't talk about the Vice Presidency during that brief chat. The fact is, nobody knows.

Q Is he going to confer with his present Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: The present Vice President has been a very active participant in this week's events, as you know, including last night's platform.

Q Will you let me please follow up my question? People are all bellowing. I would like to finish the question. You took off on Rockefeller's activities last night. You said he has been a very active participant. Has he been an active participant in the Vice Presidential selection process?

MR. NESSEN: The President has discussed it with him, yes.

Q Is he going to discuss it with him some more?

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

Q Will the President give Ronald Reagan's word any more weight in his mind-making-up process than anyone else?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't say to what degree that will affect him as opposed to someone else's views and his own views. It is a complex process.

Q Ron, is there any plan to support Rockefeller for National Committee Chairman?

MR. NESSEN: There is no plan to, John.

Q What about coverage of the President tonight?

MR. NESSEN: We are working on what I hope will be a satisfactory pool plan, Aldo. I want to make sure it is acceptable to the President and if he says okay, then I will announce it later this afternoon.

Wait a minute. Are you talking about watching the balloting?

Q Both.

MR. NESSEN: Certainly, if the President goes tonight to see Governor Reagan tonight, there will be a travel pool, and I am working on what I hope will be an acceptable plan for a pool to watch at least part of the balloting with the President.

Q Will that be more than one pool?

MR. NESSEN: Just one.

Q Your comment was very interesting on the foreign policy amendment. You mean to say the Administration doesn't view that as critical?

MR. NESSEN: We have no objection to this. As I say, it is based on the -- these basic principles outlined in this amendment are the ones on which the Ford foreign policy has been based.

Q If you have no objection to it, why didn't you say so in the first place when it was proposed?

MR. NESSEN: As I said when it came up, if it came up we would take a look at it and give a view.

Q Why did it take you so long to make up your mind? Everyone was kept waiting around until around midnight before anything was said.

MR. NESSEN: I mean, Aldo, as I said, what happened was there were other matters to deal with and when it came time to deal with this one, there were conferences held and the President made a decision and sent the word to his aides.

Q Did the Vice President help him in making a decision? Did the Vice President involve Kissinger in this?

MR. NESSEN: The Vice President, I think, spoke eloquently on television last night in explaining why this amendment was acceptable.

Q You said Dr. Kissinger was consulted --

MR. NESSEN: I said I thought his views were certainly brought into this.

Q Were his views supportive of this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely what his views were.

Q Do you know imprecisely what they were?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q Who will be with the President in his suite tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't got the full list, but I will get it for you. I think the family will be in the arena but the Cheney-Marsh folks will be up there.

Q Can you give us anything further, time-wise, for a departure on Friday?

MR. NESSEN: I would say for your own planning and guidance, you could look for a departure Friday around noon.

Q From where?

MR. NESSEN: From the airport. That is just rough and only for your guidance so you can plan your lives.

Q Will he address the Republican National Committee Friday morning?

MR. NESSEN: I think there is a plan for the President to attend that meeting.

Q When is that and where?

MR. NESSEN: It is traditional, I think you know, for the Republican National Committee to meet on the day after the Convention, so Friday morning is the RNC meeting and I do expect the President to go to that.

Q Will there be a recommendation for the Chairman?

MR. NESSEN: I am not ready to say anything about that, yet.

Q Since the President's floor manager, Senator Griffin, told the Detroit Free Press of trying to work the Reagan supporters, "even if we have to hold our noses," and since this pamphlet issued by Rogers Morton referred to 16-C is not honest and not sincere, I was wondering, how does the President think the terminology by such close associates will help with the unity needed to beat Jimmy Carter?

MR. NESSEN: Is that a multiple choice?

Q We hear a lot about unity. We heard that mentioned yesterday when Griffin said, "we will work with the Reagan supporters if we have to hold our noses," and they say this is dishonest. I wonder, what is the President's feeling about this?

MR. NESSEN: About what?

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Q His close associates are using this terminology.

MR. NESSEN: I will have to look at them, Les. I haven't seen any one of those statements.

Q Ron, the pool this morning reported the President was asked if he was going to have any Vice Presidential candidates coming in to see him today. The President replied, "I might have a lot of them." You said it is not on his schedule for him to see anybody else, but you said that yesterday and I know some people he saw who were not on the schedule.

So, I am asking, can we believe your schedule?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, you can believe the schedule. I don't know of any plan for the President to interview people as Vice Presidential possibilities today. I mean, it is obvious that at the Governor's meeting this morning there were people who have been mentioned but the purpose of that meeting was not to interview them and there may be others the President crosses paths with today in the course of his moving around town or having meetings here that may have been mentioned, also.

Q But coming in to see him, that is the way the question was.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans. I will check further.

Q Is he about to do that at all at any time during the selection process?

MR. NESSEN: What, have an interview process?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: It is not planned that he will, no.

Q Ron, what was the President's reaction to the Vice President's tussle last night over the sign? He saw it, didn't he? Did he see this on TV?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he did.

Q He knows about it. He is aware of what happened. I wonder, has he said anything about it? Did he smile, or was he happy about it or what?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard any reaction from him about it.

Q No reaction at all?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Are there any other briefings planned by the PFC staff?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for any further PFC briefings in here. Peter doesn't plan to. What I would like to do is if we have anything to post, is to post it about 6:00. That 6:00 posting could well include pool plans for coverage of the balloting tonight. The office is open all the time and you can come in there if you have any questions or problems.

Q Are you planning to get out an advance text of the President's acceptance speech like tomorrow afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: I am aiming to get out a text out of the President's acceptance speech somewhere between mid- and late afternoon tomorrow.

Q How long will it be, would you guess?

MR. NESSEN: I would guess the spoken word would be somewhere around 25 minutes with time for interruptions for applause after virtually every sentence.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 11:31 A.M. CDT)