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

#579

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:33 A.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 13, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think you saw the schedule for today, and there are no changes in that. The purpose of this EPB meeting is for the President to review the tax bill that is moving through Congress and see what the provisions are and what his views are.

Q Do you plan to give a read-out on that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to attend the meeting and I will see afterward whether there is anything we can report.

Q Is the bill here yet?

MR. NESSEN: The bill is not through Congress yet.

Q Will that meeting be open, in view of the sunshine bill?

MR. NESSEN: Is the EPB one of those covered by the sunshine bill?

Bill Scranton is coming in obviously to talk about the U.N. situation.

Q How is the U.S. going to vote tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Is it tomorrow that the North Vietnamese membership is coming up?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. Maybe I could get Bill Scranton to talk to you afterward, if there is any interest in doing that.

Q Would you get him to talk today or is it tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: He is coming in to see the President at 12:30 to talk about the session. If there is any interest, I can try to have him come and talk to you.

MORE

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Q What time would that be?

MR. NESSEN: It could be 12:15 or 12:30 or 12:45 or 1:00 or something like that.

Q Is the President going to deliver the American speech at the U.N.?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of it, if he is. There is no plan for him to.

The President telephoned Kissinger this morning shortly after Kissinger took off. He called him aboard the plane. It was just a brief conversation in which the President wished him good luck on his mission in Africa.

Q Did they set a tentative figure on the Rhodesian safety net, like the --

MR. NESSEN: I think Henry talked about that at his news conference Saturday, Dick. I know that whole idea or concept is very far from being at the place where those kinds of questions can be answered.

On Wednesday, for the trip to the University of Michigan, tentatively I would look for a press check-in at 1:15 at Andrews and a press take-off at 1:45. If the normal pattern holds true, I would think the President would be leaving roughly an hour later, say 2:45 or so.

Q That doesn't leave much time for campus activities.

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have anything to announce yet on his earlier activities. I think there will be some.

Q That gets us there at what time?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is about an hour flight, so say 3:45. They are on the same time we are.

Q Is he going to watch the football team practice while he is there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is one of the ideas.

Q Will we have an advance text before we leave?

MR. NESSEN: You are going to have an advance text before you leave.

Q Is there any way you can get a schedule? Apparently the people who deal with television, which I don't know anything about, need this to have some idea about these things.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, we will have it in time.

Q We don't usually get those schedules until we leave and by that time it is very difficult.

MR. NESSEN: I know.

Q Have you a subject for the speech?

Q Do you have an approximate time for the speech?

MR. NESSEN: The approximate time for the speech is 7:30, I believe.

Q What is the approximate time on the advance text?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean when it will be available?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: If the press plane leaves at 1:15 it has to be available certainly before 1:15. I don't know yet. The President hasn't finished writing it. In fact, he is with the speechwriters now working on it. So, it is hard to tell when it will be finished. If this were the best of all possible worlds, I would hope to have it by say 10:00 or 11:00 on Wednesday morning.

Q Don't start getting into that "best of all possible worlds" with us.

MR. NESSEN: You don't like those classical illusions?

Q What about a subject, please?

MR. NESSEN: Since it is still being worked on, Walt, even as we speak, I would like to hold off on describing it any more than it has already been described.

Q Would you call it a major speech?

MR. NESSEN: I would never call it a major speech.

Q Is there going to be a briefing on Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: Let's not.

Q Would you characterize the speech in some way, in view of the fact this is --

MR. NESSEN: Let me say this about Wednesday. As we mentioned the other day, the NATO Council is coming on Wednesday to meet the President. That is at 11:00. If you recall last year when the President met with Secretary General Luns, Luns came out in response to a request and answered some questions. It is possible that he might do that this year, too.

I am aware of the fact you have to leave for the airport at 12:30, but I think we can get all those activities in.

Q How about a text of his remarks to them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is the kind of meeting it is. He does not have a prepared text.

Q He has in Brussels, on occasion, hasn't he?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but this will not be that kind of occasion.

Q Can you describe the audience at Ann Arbor? Is this a student-faculty convocation or is it some special sort of honors day or do you have any idea what the occasion is or the group?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is any of those things you mentioned, Jim. I think it is an opportunity to come hear the President if anybody wants to.

Q Will there be a question and answer session?

MR. NESSEN: No, it will be a speech.

Q Is the PFC paying all the expenses?

MR. NESSEN: As always, yes.

Q Is it a rally?

MR. NESSEN: It is a speech.

Q Would it be more a political rally?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is a speech.

Q What is he going to do before the speech?

MR. NESSEN: I told you earlier he was going to have some activities on campus, but I am not ready to announce the schedule yet.

Q Are they inviting people, Ron, or is it invitations or what?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to check on this to find out the exact arrangements, but as far as I know, it is if you want to hear the President, come hear the President. If you don't -- it is not required attendance. (Laughter)

Q Is a local Republican group there sponsoring it or is the school inviting the President to come there?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check on the background and find out, if there is so much interest. I didn't realize there would be, but I will find out some of these details.

Q Is the speech the final event on the Wednesday schedule? Will he come home directly after the speech?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, yes.

Q Would you perceive any more travel before the first debate?

MR. NESSEN: When is the first debate?

Q The 23rd.

Q Between the 15th and the 23rd, do you have anything?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any trips that are planned between the return from Ann Arbor and the first debate.

Q I don't mean to belabor this, but do you know if he has permission to speak on the campus? Has this been cleared with the school?

MR. NESSEN: I think so because I think those folks who are there making arrangements obviously have been making --

Q There must be some group in charge of this.

MR. NESSEN: John, who attends the scheduling meeting each day and is more intimately familiar with these things than I am, says the PFC chapter on campus is the sponsoring organization.

Are you absolutely sure of that, John?

MR. CARLSON: No.

Q Could I ask a question on another subject? Is the President aware of a report to the effect that Interior Secretary Kleppe was aware of the imperfect welds in the Alaska pipeline at least a year before the Congress and the Congressional investigating committee stumbled upon those, and that Kleppe did nothing about it in that year? Is the President aware of information to that effect?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. Let me check.

Q Ron, about the sunshine bill that the President is signing today, is it his understanding that this will affect at all the Federal Reserve Board's meeting where they set interest?

MR. NESSEN: Have we got the fact sheet on that?

Q The fact sheet doesn't say.

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Q I have a procedural question. Bill Roberts tells me the remarks of the Catholic bishops who were here the other day have not been transcribed, but they were recorded. He says the reason is the normal policy is that private groups meet the press on the lawn and it was raining so they were asked in.

My question is --

MR. NESSEN: They asked to come in, yes.

Q My question is, isn't it a fact that many private groups have met here before with the press, and do you know of any time, when once allowed access to the podium, that the remarks were recorded but not transcribed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall any previous circumstances quite like this, but I think, as the people who were here last week know, the Catholic bishops were extremely conscious of wanting to be very correct in their relationship here and did not want any photo, for instance, released, did not want to appear -- I should not speak for the Bishops -- but certainly did not want to appear to be speaking as agents or spokesmen for the White House. So, our plan was to not have them use the Briefing Room but since it was raining or threatening to rain, they did use the Briefing Room. But, in order to keep the event separate from any kind of White House-sponsored or endorsed or arranged thing, we decided not to put out a transcript.

Q How about the two questions? Have there not been other private groups here, and do you know of any instances when, once allowed in and had their remarks recorded, that they were not transcribed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any occasion when they were transcribed, actually.

Q The anti-busing academicians met here, which is one that comes instantly to mind, and there was quite a thick transcript on that.

MR. NESSEN: Was there? I don't know.

Q The usual pattern is the other way, is it not? The usual pattern is to transcribe and make transcripts available. Isn't the episode with the bishops more of the uncommon rather than the common?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check back and see what our custom has been, Jim.

Q When I inquired, one of your people initially said, yes, there would be a transcript, and then apparently a decision was made to have no transcript.

MR. NESSEN: If it was differently than before, it was my choice reflecting what I felt was the bishops' own attitude of not wanting to appear to be here under the sponsorship of or direction of or on behalf of the White House.

Q Ron, does that mean there will be no transcript of that briefing?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't plan to make a transcript.

Q That raises the whole question of your responsibility or the White House's responsibility when you have a group in this Briefing Room -- which is a briefing room for the purpose of briefing the press, as I understand it -- this is setting up an inconsistent kind of ground rules and I don't think your position is defensible, and I would like to repeat my request for a transcript of the bishops' appearance.

MR. NESSEN: I am in somewhat a "no win" situation here, Jim, since I am obviously trying to be extremely careful not to have stories written saying that the White House set up this elaborate recording process, handed out transcripts to make sure everybody got the word and so forth, and I think you realize that is something that I do face. It is such a long past event now, Jim, that I am not sure --

Q There is a principle involved where we would like to have the principle established to cover the future -- even if this is a fairly academic proposition -- and the principle we don't want is the transcripts are put out and not put out at the discretion of the White House Press Office.

MR. NESSEN: This was an unusual event in that there was no plan to bring this group to the White House Briefing Room because you can imagine what the stories would say then, and it was done only because of the weather. We don't make a transcript of people who speak in the driveway or who go back to their own headquarters, or whatever.

Q While we are on this subject, who is allowed to use this room? What is the criteria?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I would have to stop and think exactly what the criteria is.

Q Ron, does your statement about your being in a "no win" situation on the transcript indicate to you that you and other people in the White House believe the bishops' statements were favorable to the President's candidacy?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to let you judge that, Phil.

Q Ron, do you make the decision on things like that or is that made by one of your superior officers?

MR. NESSEN: I only have one superior officer here, and in this case I made that decision.

Q Why did you permit the events to be televised if you wanted to make the separation that you are suggesting?

MR. NESSEN: I wish we could program the press as well as we are given credit for. We go on and do the business here and it is your business to decide what and how to cover it. Obviously, we did not order anybody to put anything on television or on the wires or in the newspaper. It was an event and it was your judgment how to cover it, just like it is your judgment how to cover any event.

Q But you are not providing a transcript because this was not in effect an official proceeding in this room?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct, it was not.

Q Millions of people around the country saw this thing on television in the White House Briefing Room. There was no explanation that would suggest anything but that it was official.

MR. NESSEN: We are not in the business of giving explanations on television. If those who put the programs on television chose to, I suppose they could have said it was moved inside out of the rain.

Q I didn't remember it was raining. Was it?

MR. NESSEN: I would have to get Bill Roberts who I think took most of the inquiries and most of the complaints that to do it outside would be a problem for cameras and note-takers and so forth.

Q I remember now because we staked it out out there and we were all out there.

MR. NESSEN: Maybe the best way to deal with this sort of issue is to put them outside all the time regardless of weather.

Let me give some information instead of this, which I don't think is going very far.

Q Could I ask, as a point of information, Ron, do we pay for the transcripts that are produced of White House events? Is there a charge to the media organization for that?

MR. NESSEN: No. I think, if I am not mistaken, that is paid for by the Archives. There is a contract with the Alderson Reporting service and I don't know who pays the charges, but you don't, except, I think there is a system for news conferences where you pay.

Q Is that the purpose of the sunshine law -- to keep it from raining on days bishops are here? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is not the purpose of this bill.

Two questions that were asked earlier: One, who sponsors the President's trip to the University of Michigan? An organization called Students for President Ford, an organization on the campus, invited the President to speak there.

The sunshine bill does in broad terms affect the Federal Reserve system, but the Federal Reserve Board can close meetings which deal with sensitive information affecting markets, just so they keep a transcript.

Q Ron, does "Students for President Ford" exist only on that one campus?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. Maybe this is a local campus organization, but I think there are Ford Committees on many campuses.

Q Is Arthur Burns still opposed to --

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. Arthur Burns and the Federal Reserve system is independent of the White House, and you will have to ask Arthur Burns.

Q One final question on this. If the tapes have not been done away with and if I called the bishops and they say it is all right, will you make a transcript of it?

MR. NESSEN: No, I won't.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I explained that.

Q What if the bishops say it is all right?

MR. NESSEN: I don't plan to, because it was an event that was moved indoors, I thought, for the comfort and courtesy to the press -- although apparently there is now a great outcry about having done that -- and as a courtesy to the bishops, so they wouldn't get wet.

But the point is -- looking at it from my point of view -- what would have happened if I had produced a transcript and handed it out? I would have gotten blamed for exploiting the bishops. I can't win.

Q This is a public house.

MR. NESSEN: Helen, you would have been the first to write the story --

Q This is discriminating as to who uses these lectern and who does not.

MR. NESSEN: Helen, on the basis of this, I think we will look very carefully now at who does use the lectern. I thought I did it as a courtesy due to the threat of rain. I did not want to put out the transcript because I did not want to be accused of exploiting or making use of the bishops.

These are the problems I see from my side, and that is the reason I did it the way I did. I see the problems from your side, but I feel very sure that there would have been a story written saying that the White House apparatus had rolled into action and exploited the bishops by parading them out in front of the TV cameras and making a transcript.

Q Did the President see the transcript of the bishops' remarks?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q If you didn't want to exploit them, why didn't you run them out the South door like you always do when you have people in here you don't want us to talk to?

MR. NESSEN: You had asked to talk to them, Bob.

Q Ron, does this mean the next time it rains we are going to have an outdoor news conference? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It would save me a lot of problems.

Q Ron, you have now put yourself in an almost classic news management position. You are now expressing the position that you did not put out the transcript because -- I am trying to look at it from your point of view here -- you are now expressing the position you did not put out a transcript because you feared stories and wished to avoid stories and avert stories that would say that you were exploiting the Catholic bishops for political purposes.

Is this the position that you wish to put yourself in at this briefing?

MR. NESSEN: What is the alternative?

Q The alternative is to put out the transcript, of course.

MR. NESSEN: I think we will not, Jim.

Q Do you have any news you would like to discuss?

MR. NESSEN: I gave some little bit of news here.

MORE

Q Did the President receive any message from the Chinese Government after Mao's death on the post-Mao Sino-American relations?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge we have not received any message from the Chinese.

Q Would he like to see Schlesinger when he comes back from China?

MR. NESSEN: I think Schlesinger will be asked to brief the appropriate people when he gets back.

Q Is the President "the appropriate people"?

MR. NESSEN: I can't really answer that question today.

Q Ron, in view of the statements from the so-called moderate African leaders that Secretary Kissinger is merely trying to shore up the white position in Southern Africa and his own pessimism, his own stated pessimism about the prospects of success, is the President at all concerned about the possibility of a breakdown in the shuttle diplomacy and any possible domestic political repercussions therefrom?

MR. NESSEN: I think Henry had an extensive news conference on Saturday and the President spoke about it on Saturday and I think they both emphasized their caution and the many difficulties that are faced, but they also emphasized the reasons why they felt it was necessary for the President to send Dr. Kissinger on this mission.

Q Ron, does the White House plan to make public the replies to the Vice Presidential selection questionnaire from Senator Dole, and why not?

MR. NESSEN: You would just accuse me of exploiting Senator Dole if I put that out.

What do you mean, his --

Q His questionnaire responses.

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't plan to put that out.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: Why?

Q Didn't you say at the beginning you would put it out?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean he sent in his list of five people? Is that what you are asking for?

Q No. He filled out his papers.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. He has already put out two of the three items that he pledged.

Q Why hasn't he put out the one on his health?

MR. NESSEN: According to Speakes they are getting it in the proper form and will issue it relatively soon.

Q But he hasn't put out the questionnaire and Mondale and the Carter campaign made public his questionnaire.

MR. NESSEN: Dole has put out ten years of his tax records, which I think the other side has not matched, and put out his net worth statement -- and I don't know if Mondale has put that out or not -- and will certainly put out his health records, and I don't think the other side has put that out, either.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 11:58 A.M. EDT)