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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. PDT

OCTOBER 5, 1974

TUESDAY

(San Francisco, (alifornia))

MR. NESSEN: There is a sign-up sheet for White House press who want to go to the theatre tomorrow night.

There is a modification of the proclamation concerning sugar, a modification of the President's proclamation concerning sugar and molasses, and Margaret Earl can give you a little guidance as to what this means.

There are some appointments, some more appointments, the statement I mentioned to you yesterday--the President's statement on the conclusion of this session of Congress, and more appointments.

Q It is for these who have signed up to attend the debate? Where and when was the sign-up?

MR. NESSEN: If you are signed up for the trip, Jim.

Q It is automatic?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You will have credentials?

MR. NESSEN: Just go and pick up your credentials.

Q You didn't announce it but do you have a report on the MAYAGUEZ and the President's reaction to that?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't seen the report.

Q The President has not seen the report?

MR. NESSEN: He has not.

Q Has the President seen the news account? He is an avid newspaper reader so I assume he read that.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know it was in the newspaper.

Q It is here. It says "lives wasted" --

MR. NESSEN: I assume he may have read it.

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Q I thought you said he hadn't seen it. Now you say it was in the paper and he probably has.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. If it was in the papers he has probably seen it.

Q I thought you said you didn't have a comment because he hadn't seen it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a comment either way.

Q You haven't talked to him about it?

MR. NESSEN: I have not.

Q Will you see him this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Will you talk to him?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think we will have any comments on the report.

Q Will you have a comment after you get a copy of it?

MR. NESSEN: Probably not. I don't think we will get a copy of it. The GAO is an arm of Congress, as I understand it.

Q How about telling us about this trip?

Q The White House does have a news monitoring operation --

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q -- on flashes of important news stories to you. You wouldn't have any comment or make no effort to find out what it was?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what comment there could be on it.

Q You are accused of wasting lives, so I would think you would have a comment.

MR. NESSEN: I, myself, am not familiar with the report but, if the conclusion is as Phil states it --

Q Just a minute -- not what Phil says. The paper says: "A Congressional study of the 1975 MAYAGUEZ seizure by Cambodia concludes, in essence, that 49 American lives were lost unnecessarily because of hasty U.S. decision-making and poorly coordinated intelligence."

MR. NESSEN: We disagree with that completely, if that is the conclusion.

Q You are disagreeing or have you talked with the President?

MR. NESSEN: You know, as always, Phil, I speak for the White House and the President.

Q What is the basis of disagreement? What are the facts --

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I am not going into a long discussion of the MAYAGUEZ case at this point. We disagree.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: I am not prepared to go into a long dissertation of the MAYAGUEZ case.

Q Tell us about the President's day and how long this trip will last. There are varying rumors as to whether he will go back to Washington Saturday night or go back on Sunday.

MR. NESSEN: As I told you, there is the possibility of staying Saturday night in Dallas. That has not been completely arranged yet and, when it is, I will let you know.

Q Ron, I am not clear whether you have in fact discussed this GAO report with anybody or you are just reacting.

MR. NESSEN: I would not react off-the-cuff, Bob.

Q So, you have discussed this?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Would you tell us who with?

MR. NESSEN: I speak for the White House and the President, and our reaction is we disagree with that conclusion if it is the conclusion.

Q A minute ago you said you had not talked to the President. Who did you discuss it with?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think you need to know who I discussed it with. I am giving you the White House reaction to the GAO report.

Q You are saying this is the White House reaction without your having discussed it with the President?

MR. NESSEN: As always, I never go into who I discuss what with.

Q You said you had not discussed it with the President.

MR. NESSEN: I am giving the White House reaction to the newspaper account of the GAO report.

Q Does the President agree with Mike Duval that the Butz issue has no place in this week's debate?

MR. NESSEN: I think whatever the reporters on the panel care to raise, Phil, you will have to ask them. They ask the questions.

Q Mike Duval said he talked to Mr. Scranton earlier and he said it had no place in the foreign affairs debate. Does the President agree with this?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with Mike's remarks.

Q Did the President talk to Scranton about it?

MR. NESSEN: No, not to my knowledge.

Q What is the President doing today?

MR. NESSEN: The President -- as you know, we have part of the morning schedule. After Dr. Hayakawa left, the President expects to spend the day preparing for the debate mostly by himself with the reading materials, papers and so forth.

Q How many briefing books does he have?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is a question of how many books. Some papers are in folders, some in loose-leaf books, some stapled together, various documents.

Q When will you update us?

MR. NESSEN: My plan would be, if we have anything further to say or report, it would be at 5 o'clock.

Q We can expect no more functions today with the President?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q No more pools?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q When the President met last week with Butz and reprimanded the Secretary, did they discuss whether or not the Secretary would resign and, if so, to the extent to which it would depend on the reaction?

MR. NESSEN: You know that question was asked about three days ago, Jim. What I said then was --

Q It wasn't answered then.

MR. NESSEN: It was a private meeting then and still is a private meeting. I didn't sit in on it, and there is no way I could retroactively have sat in on it, so the answer is the same as before.

Q Has the White House asked Butz to campaign for the President?

MR. NESSEN: I think Bill Greener can tell you the answer to that.

MR. GREENER: Jim Baker talked to him yesterday but I haven't had a chance to talk to Jim yet.

Q The question was, has he been asked by the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there is anything further than what we said yesterday.

Q Ron, have you been asked -- I am sorry to repeat the question -- have you been asked whether or not the White House invited James Schlesinger to talk to the President after he returned from China?

MR. NESSEN: I think when the matter came up about a month ago I was asked and I said then, obviously, the appropriate people would like to talk to Jim when he came out of China. That is still true.

Q Schlesinger indicated in Plains that he hadn't talked to the President because he hadn't been invited, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will have to check. We said about a month ago the appropriate people would certainly like to talk to him.

Q He hasn't talked to the President?

MR. NESSEN: He hasn't, so far as I know.

Q Did he talk to anybody on the White House staff?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I said I would check.

Q Do you know on the same thing whether the appropriate people told Mr. Schlesinger that it is a requisite?

MR. NESSEN: I will check and see.

Q Outside giving Mr. Butz a severe reprimand and accepting his resignation, would the President want him to campaign for him during the rest of his campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to add on the Butz matter beyond what the President said in his own words yesterday.

Q Why is that?

MR. NESSEN: The President speaks pretty clearly --

Q He didn't deal with this issue. It seems like it is a fairly simple question to answer yes or no.

MR. NESSEN: For any details on what campaigning Earl Butz will do, you need to talk to Bill.

Any views the President may have beyond yesterday, I don't know.

Q Doesn't he decide who will campaign for him?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask Bill. For the President's view, I don't have anything further than what he said yesterday.

Q Are you suggesting the campaigning is up to the campaign committee?

MR. NESSEN: Bill can give you any details on campaigning.

Q I am curious about what seems to be a new policy here about the White House; that is, keeping the President away from the press. We have the instance on Sunday where ropes were brought in for the first time I remember to keep the press and the public away from him as he left church. We had a situation yesterday where some of the staff people stepped in to prevent press people from getting close to him. Why this new policy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is a new policy, and I don't think it is an adequate description. Helen chatted with the President, the pool folks and I guess Tom was there. Everybody was, I guess, about six feet from the President. Helen chatted with him. I don't know what the ropes were doing there Sunday. I didn't have anything to do with putting up ropes. I think Connie has pulled together a list of the interviews and news conferences the President has had. It runs, I guess, literally into the hundreds, so I just don't agree with your characterization.

Q Since we have had the Butz affair, we have not had a chance to ask the President any questions where he would stand still and answer them. We are either yelling them from behind ropes and he is running off or there is just a total isolation.

MR. NESSEN: Helen didn't have trouble talking to him this morning.

Q You know it was still in a manner of banter and you wouldn't have like it if I asked a Butz question. You did bar us yesterday from approaching him. Why? What is this business of restricting questions?

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree with your characterization.

Q You have put a cordon around the President for about three days, literally.

Q Does the President agree that Butz' remarks will jeopardize relations with black Africa?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I haven't talked to him about that particular aspect.

Q Why did it take three days for the Secretary of Agriculture's resignation and its acceptance to jell after he was reprimanded?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask the Secretary.

Q The White House must have some thoughts about that.

MR. NESSEN: Nothing beyond what was said.

Q Do you dispute the statement of Jimmy Carter that you were waiting to see how severe the reaction might be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think you were there Sunday, Jim, but there was a long discussion with about 20 reporters who were there, and I said then that that was not a correct statement.

Q Do you make it a point not to ask the President questions you think we might ask you?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know it is just the opposite.

Q These are obvious questions you, as a former newsman, would know we would be interested in. Why don't you ever ask him?

MR. NESSEN: It is not my policy to discuss my own private discussions with the President.

Q To get back to the MAYAGUEZ thing for a minute, I am at a loss to understand your reluctance to state why you disagree with this conclusion that the GAO has reached?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen the GAO report, no one here has. As I mentioned to Phil, it is in the newspaper, and people here read the newspaper.

Q You say you won't ever have a comment on it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate we will.

Q You disagree but you will never have a comment on why you disagree with the conclusion; is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: The President, as you know, carried out the actions in the MAYAGUEZ situation. You heard him speak about it before. I don't see any reason --

Q That is why I am asking. The President has over the course of many months, especially at the outset, made quite a thing out of the MAYAGUEZ action. He has referred to it many, many times and pridefully. Why now, when he is questioned, does the White House simply say we don't agree with the conclusion but no longer defends the action?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know why you say no longer defends the action, Jim. What I am saying is I can't quite get the drift of why, on this particular Tuesday morning, I need to go back and recount to you the history of the MAYAGUEZ, and why the President took the actions and what the situation is, was, and what the results were. You know that. It is on the record, and it hasn't changed, and is not going to change, and I just don't feel that this morning -- you know, I can't see the reason why this morning I need to stand here and give you a very lengthy defense of the MAYAGUEZ.

Q Two specific questions -- does the President still believe the MAYAGUEZ action was justified in light of what the GAO report has said?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is what I was trying to get at when I said we disagreed with the conclusion.

Q Secondly, will this report cause the White House to take any further look at the procedures of the MAYAGUEZ action?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, no.

Q Ron, has the White House ever done a study --

MR. NESSEN: Look, I am not going to do this number. You know we talked about it. When was MAYAGUEZ -- a year and a half ago? I think the thing was examined minute-by-minute, half-a-minute-by-half-a-minute in every newspaper, magazine, and television show. The interval of time has not affected the analyses that you made, that we made. Nothing has changed during this particular period.

Q Ron, my recollection is the President asked for a study after the MAYAGUEZ affair to determine why the intelligence had not been better.

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that was the purpose of it. As I recall it -- Bill maybe can help, he was there, I think, at the time. In any case, I think it was just a normal report that is made on any important international incident or problem.

Q What was the result of that study? I don't think it was ever made public.

MR. NESSEN: I would have to look it up to give you whatever unclassified portions of it there are. I don't recall.

Q Is it the feeling of the White House that this GAO report might be partisan politics?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to assess in any way that aspect of it.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to the Senate subcommittee report that says Mr. Callaway exerted pressure on Government agencies on behalf of the ski lodge?

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

Q Do you expect to?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

Q Can we file our bulletins now?

MR. NESSEN: I wonder what kept you so long, Frank.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.