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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 1:05 P.M. EST

NOVEMBER 3, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: In response to thousands of queries, I thought I would come out and say hi to you.

Q Will you let us record this?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think mostly the queries have to do with trying to reconstruct as much of the day as possible. I can run through that for you if you would like.

As we mentioned, the President went to bed at about 3:15 last night. The conclusion at that time was that the election was too close to call; that it was still feasible for the President to win, as I told you last night.

The President got up at 8:30 and, at about the same time, about 8:30, there was a meeting in Dick Cheney's office of most of the senior staff at the White House and also of the campaign. The purpose of that was to review the latest election returns, which we did, and it was clear at that meeting that Carter had won and that the outcome was not going to change.

So, at 9:57, the President came into his office and almost immediately Dick Cheney, Stu Spencer, Bob Teeter and Jack Marsh went down to the President's office and pretty much went over with him the election returns and where it stood, and reviewed the returns with the President and passed on to the President the conclusion that the outcome was clear and that Carter had won, and it was not going to change.

At that time, the President drafted a telegram of congratulations to Carter, and you have seen the text of that, I believe.

At 10:24, the President went over to the doctor's office for some treatment of his throat. I think it has already been spelled out for you. There were three different aspects of the treatment because his voice was really practically gone this morning. He could only talk in a whisper.

At 11:04, the President placed a call to Jimmy Carter in Plains.

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Q Did he tell the operator to do it or did Cheney tell the operator to do it, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that small detail, Phil.

Q Where was the President then?

MR. NESSEN: The President was in the Oval Office. The call lasted for three minutes, from 11:04 to 11:07. I would describe the talk as warm and friendly.

Q You heard both sides or just one?

MR. NESSEN: Let me get into this just a little bit now. The President was able to talk a little, or make himself understood a little during this call, but Dick Cheney was on an extension phone and Dick actually read the text of the telegram to Carter because the President's voice was just not up to reading that telegram over the phone.

After the phone call --

Q Before we leave that, the President did say something personally to Governor Carter?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct. He spoke in a warm and friendly way, and they did exchange words.

Q Did he make any comment on what Carter had said in his initial statement?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would like to treat the phone call as a private conversation.

Q Did Carter say anything about the President's illness, his voice or anything?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Phil asked whether Carter made reference to the President's voice. I think it would be fair to assume that is right. I would like not to quote from the phone conversation because it was private.

Q Before we leave that, I just wanted to get the tone. I gather this is an indication that there is not bitterness on the part of the President or his staff toward Governor Carter?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not. You can see that from the warm and friendly tone of the phone call, the words of the telegram which the President drafted, and so forth.

Q Did the President invite Carter to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: There was a discussion, very briefly, of how to proceed with the transition and, of course, the President's telegram makes reference to that, and what happened was that Carter told Dick that later today, probably later today, someone from the Carter group would be designated to be the contact with the White House on transition. That is literally all that has happened on the transition. There was the President's reference in his telegram and Carter's indication that later today he would name a person to be in charge of transition liaison for him.

The White House has not named its person and really no other details have taken place, other than that one mentioned.

Q Will that happen today? Will the White House name a person today as the White House transition person?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Are there transition offices in the EOB or are they elsewhere?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't worked out those details yet.

A little before 12:15, all of the family members came down to the Oval Office -- Mrs. Ford, Jack, Steve, Mike, Gayle and Susan -- and they spent some time by themselves in the Oval Office.

Q How do you spell Gayle?

MR. NESSEN: G-a-y-l-e.

Q Mrs. Ford, too?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Mrs. Ford, and four children and the daughter-in-law.

It was decided during that time in the Oval Office -- it was not known until then how the statement would be presented, whether the President would try to make it himself or whether it would be handed out as a written document, or whether one member of the family or the other would read it. It was decided in the gathering of the family in the Oval Office that Mrs. Ford would read it after the President said a few words, which is, as you see, how it came out.

Q Was it due to the President's voice and not his emotional condition?

MR. NESSEN: It was totally the voice.

The President indicated in the Oval Office after the statement was read by Mrs. Ford he would like to step down off the platform, as he put it, and just informally mingle with the reporters, which is what happened.

After that--you saw then the statement here and the mingling, of course--and then they went back to the President's office and spent a little more time together.

Now the President is in his office and I expect that he will work in the office this afternoon as there are various bits of paperwork to do. Then he will have a quiet dinner alone with the family tonight.

Most of you know that the President does plan to take a vacation in Palm Springs. Although the exact starting date is not 100 percent sure, it is looking very much like Sunday for departure and probably a week in Palm Springs. The President will stay in a private home. It is just a little bit up in the air which of two private homes he will stay in. That has not quite been resolved yet.

Q Is one of the two the house he stayed in before?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Fred Wilson's house.

Q Ron, I was told before that was off the record --

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but I don't mind if you want to indicate that he plans to take a vacation.

Q Ron, is he going to pursue this New York recount matter or will that be dropped now?

MR. NESSEN: It was never something that the White House was pursuing. It is the New York Republican organization, and their pursuit of it amounted to really taking some steps to assure an accurate count. But I wouldn't anticipate there would be any demand for a recount.

Q Do they feel it was accurate now?

MR. NESSEN: Generally accurate, yes.

Q In the senior staff meeting this morning, do you recall what the numbers were that told Spencer, Baker and the rest, that it was not recoverable?

MR. NESSEN: Basically the results from each State were looked at and the margin in each State that Carter had won and each State that was close or relatively close, people like Stu and Teeter, who have considerable political experience, indicated in each State that was close that in their view and based on their experience that, say, normal polling errors, that sort of thing, were not great enough or outstanding absentee ballots, that sort of thing, were not great enough to make a difference in any State.

Q Did the President receive any telephone calls or accept any last night?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I have the list here and will read it off, if you let me finish my announcements.

The Palm Springs trip, I expect that to be really very much a vacation with very little work. I mean, the necessary work of Government will be done, but I don't expect any major kinds of announcements or that sort of thing out there. It is really going to be primarily a vacation.

Q What about the size of the staff accompanying him?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't gotten that far along, Phil.

Q Are you going on that trip?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Do you intend to brief every day?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't really sat down and thought about that yet, Russ.

Q Ron, I would like to ask a question that may at first thought appear to be far out, but as a final grand illustration of what the President has in the way of consideration for his country, might he be considering a trip abroad to meet Secretary Brezhnev to finish up SALT, or might there be something along that line, not specifically that but something in that general nature?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any plans like that.

Q Was Dobrynin here this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Dobrynin was here this morning. I don't think he saw Brent, but I think he saw Bill Hyland.

Q Was the subject the Ambassador?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check and find out. I saw him going into the NSC Office, but I didn't have time to inquire as to what it was.

Q How long was he here?

Q He did not meet with the President?

MR. NESSEN: He did not.

Q Is the President still trying to get a SALT agreement before the end of his term?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly is the President up until January 20, and he will continue to conduct the business of Government, including the pursuit of those negotiations.

Q Ron, before you go on, let me ask a minor thing about the telephone conversation with Carter. Did the President explain to Governor Carter the condition of his voice or did Cheney explain it on the extension?

MR. NESSEN: No, the President did.

Now, last night's phone calls. As I mentioned last night, there was a call to Governor Connally in which I told you Governor Connally said that Texas was looking okay. There was also a call from Governor Longley of Maine. I am sorry, but I don't know what the content of that call was.

Q What were the times?

MR. NESSEN: Approximately 9:15. And then about five minutes after that, at 9:20, there was a phone call from Vice President Rockefeller. I can't give you the contents of that.

Then, there were a number of calls from Dick Cheney through the evening.

Q Did you say Rhodes called at some point?

MR. NESSEN: It is not on my list if he did.

Q What was the time of the Connally call?

MR. NESSEN: 1:45 a.m.

Q There was a second call then?

MR. CARLSON: He called at 10 o'clock.

Q Were there two calls?

MR. NESSEN: Maybe it is 9:45.. I can't read it.

Q Are these calls from Connally to the President?

MR. NESSEN: It doesn't show. It just says a call with Connally.

Q Were there two calls with Connally?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

MR. ROBERTS: Dobrynin was here on a minor administrative matter.

Q Last August, Mrs. Ford, I believe it was in an interview, made reference to the possibility of losing, and she said in that event we will go back to Alexandria to our home. I know there hasn't been much time to think about this, Ron, but do you know if there has been any discussion of this?

MR. NESSEN: There has not been any discussion of that.

Q The President is a relatively young man and very vital at this stage of his career. What does he intend to do now? Does he intend to write memoirs? Does he intend to teach?

MR. NESSEN: Joe, I don't think he has really focused on precisely what he is going to do. I know sometimes in conversations with friends and with journalists even I have heard him talk about an interest in teaching political science at a university. I don't know how much of that is kind of thinking out loud on his part and how much of it is a specific aim of what he intends to do. At this point, I really can't say what, on January 21, he will be doing.

Q Has he said anything about practicing law possibly?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has not.

Q Have you heard any discussion either by the senior staff or by reflecting the President's point of view on "what ifs" in this election? I mean, things that might have been done that might have pushed it over or things that might not have been done that would have saved some votes?

MR. NESSEN: I think you probably get as many different opinions as you have senior staff members, or maybe 10 opinions for each senior staff member. I think any time you have an election that is this close and that turns on such a very small change in one or a few States, you know it could be any one of a number of things, or a combination of a number of things. At this point, nobody has sat down and really tried to pin down what factor or combination of factors made the difference other than to observe that in such a close election when such a small change would have changed the outcome that it could have been any of a number of things or combinations.

Q Speaking for yourself, do you have any observations on that point?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I have really had a chance to put my thoughts in order.

Q Has Governor Reagan contacted the President either by wire or phone?

MR. NESSEN: Not by phone, and I will check on the wires.

Q On the phone listing, there was no mention last night or today, but did he talk to Senator Dole?

MR. NESSEN: Dole viewed the returns with him in the Residence.

Q How about today?

MR. NESSEN: Larry was here but I am not sure whether Dole was.

Q Has the President any plans to send out a multitude of messages, or telegrams, to various Members of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: You mean to those who have won elections or those who helped in his election?

Q Those who won and those who helped.

MR. NESSEN: I think the statement Mrs. Ford read today conveyed a general appreciation of people who had worked in his behalf. I am sure that he will be sending letters and telegrams to those who were leaders of his campaign.

Q Did the President express anything in the past 12 hours or so on what factor he thought might have been the --

MR. NESSEN: No, I think he is more or less in the same boat that I mentioned to Mort, which is that he hasn't really had time to sort out what factor or combination made the difference.

Q Do you have anything else anticipated for us today?

MR. NESSEN: No, and I would like to put on a lid for the day. I think a good number of the staff will go home to see their families and get some sleep. Certainly the folks in my office I would like to give some time off to.

Q When will you announce Helms' resignation?

MR. NESSEN: I thought UPI had already announced it. We will do it tomorrow.

Q One of the things that came up during the last week or ten days was the revelation of Secretary Kissinger confirming contacts had been made with Hanoi about perhaps initiating diplomatic relations if the MIA thing is solved. Is that one of the matters the President will continue to pursue or work on in the remaining two months or so of his term?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to pin down specifics. Nothing that is an ongoing project, either domestically or internationally, is going to be changed or halted because of the election. He does remain the President.

Q There are certain things that anyone would especially like to get wrapped up.

MR. NESSEN: If you have read some of the immediate pre-election interviews that the President has given, one of the questions he has been often asked is, what do you intend to pursue in a second term. Obviously, there will not be a second term, but that will give you a clue of some of the things he is going to pursue in his remaining months in office, I think.

Q For those of us who switched back and forth between candidates --

MR. NESSEN: He talked about SALT, he talked about additional progress in the Middle East, and he talked about progress in Southern Africa as the top three priority items in foreign policy.

Domestic policy, I think he has always said holding down Government spending, to curb inflation, and taking steps to insure additional jobs and economic prosperity.

Q Are there any foreign visits on his agenda between now and January 20?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, you didn't announce it and I wonder if you know whether or not there was any call from Richard Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: It certainly didn't show up on any list I saw.

Q He never congratulated him on the nomination, either, did he?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that he did.

Q You said you were not sure of what telegrams had been received. Is there some way you could check?

MR. NESSEN: I have not had time to look at the telegrams.

Q If there is, could you post that?

MR. NESSEN: I will check that.

Q Does the President intend to spend the rest of the day in the Oval Office? Is he also going to call it a day after a while?

MR. NESSEN: I know he will spend some time working in the Oval Office this afternoon. I don't know precisely what time he will go home, to the Residence.

Q The next few days, will it be business as usual in the White House for him?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is he still taking chicken soup?

MR. NESSEN: Dr. Lukash didn't mention that.

Q One thing I haven't heard mentioned today is him describing how he feels today. How does he feel today?

MR. NESSEN: Somebody else here, I think, probably summed it up when they said he seems to feel a lot better than we do.

Q How is he physically? Is he exhausted, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He got a pretty good night's sleep last night. He slept until 8:30 -- from, say, 3:15 until 8:30.

Q Ron, do you know when Teeter or Baker, or any of those people gave him the final poll they had taken on key States before the vote? Was it in Grand Rapids or before Grand Rapids?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check, Tom.

Q Was Wisconsin your big nasty surprise of the night?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather let Baker or Teeter take on some of those kinds of questions.

Q Back to the mood for a minute. Would it be fair to characterize the mood as saying the President is disappointed but not depressed? How else would you --

MR. NESSEN: Certainly he is disappointed. But I think you saw him yourself and I think you would have to say he was -- truly his own strength seemed to really give strength to members of his own family and members of the staff who were quite affected by that defeat. I think gracious in defeat, also, I would say.

Q Whose suggestion was it that Mrs. Ford be the spokesman?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it was the President and Mrs. Ford together who decided that. The family decided that when they were in the office together.

Q Cheney and no other staff person was in there? It was strictly a family decision?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 1:27 P.M. EST)

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