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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:35 A.M. EST

DECEMBER 1, 1976

WEDNESDAY

M . NESSEN: I want to start a little early today because I have a meeting to go to at 11:30 and I wanted to get this done before that.

Q What sort of meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Just a meeting with the President.

Q Did you see him this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I did.

Let me mention one or two small items. At 2:00 o'clock, as the schedule shows, the President is having a meeting to continue making his tentative decisions on areas of the budget. This particular meeting will deal with the budget for the Federal Energy Administration, the National Science Foundation, and a couple of other agencies in that area. This will be the final meeting of this phase of the budget process; that is, the making of tentative decisions line by line, agency by agency.

The next phase of the budget process is for the officials of the departments and agencies to come in and appeal if they disagree with the President's tentative decisions. That process will start probably later this week, I think very likely on Friday. I will let you know when it does and which agency will be the one appealing the decisions first.

Q You will volunteer that to us?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

You saw the ceremony just now in which the President greeted the winners of the Rockefeller Public Service Awards. That was not the actual presentation ceremony. That comes at a lunch today. The President is not attending the lunch but he did want to meet the winners and congratulate them.

We have a fair amount of printed material which discusses the background of the awards, which are now 15 years old, a slight change in the program this year, and the names of the winners and biographies of the winners. We have that available for you.

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I have some updated figures on earthquake relief. There was not much interest the other day. If there is today, I have it and can give it to you.

I promised that as we went along I would try to keep you posted on whatever decisions were made by the President concerning his plans after January 20th, and I think I indicated a couple of Saturdays ago that the Fords had decided to sell their home in Alexandria. A few more details of that now.

The real estate company handling that sale for them is Previews, Inc.

Q An Alexandria firm?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is more an area-wide firm.

Q It goes up and down the coast.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. The Washington office is area-wide but they also handle houses in different parts of the country.

Prospective buyers will start to go through the house this weekend.

Q It is open this weekend?

MR. NESSEN: That is what I am told, Phil; that for the first time prospective buyers will go through this weekend.

Q Is it by appointment or is it an open house?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that. I think maybe you can check with Previews.

Q Do we have a listed sale price?

MR. NESSEN: The asking price is \$137,000.

Q Do we know how much he paid for it when he bought it?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check on that. I don't have that figure.

Q How much did he pay for that house, originally?

MR. NESSEN: Someone just asked me that, Phil. I don't have that figure.

Q How long has he owned it?

MR. NESSEN: He has owned it since the 1950's. He has owned it pretty close to 20 years.

Q Do you recall how much money he put in it to fix it up for the Secret Service agents?

MR. NESSEN: They closed in the garage and made a room out of that. But I don't recall what the cost of that was.

Q Was not some landscaping added and some bullet-proof glass installed and two or three things designed to improve security?

MR. NESSEN: There were some things done at the time he became Vice President. But I don't recall exactly what they are.

Q Do you know whether those improvements remain as part of the house now?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge they do, yes. I don't know about the bullet-proof glass. I don't recall there was bullet-proof glass.

Q He paid for that?

MR. NESSEN: He paid for that out of his own pocket. That is correct.

Q Is the house vacant now?

MR. NESSEN: The house has got a tenant in it now.

Q Do you know how many rooms?

MR. NESSEN: I don't. We will try to dig up these additional facts.

Q There is no taxpayers' money in the house?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, there is not, Sarah. The President, I think, made a point of not having any public expense.

Q Can you say anything about prospective land purchases in the Palm Springs area?

MR. NESSEN: No. When he is ready to make those decisions and announce them, we will.

Q Can you say he has not purchased a lot at this point?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowlege he has not.

Q He didn't ask for a hold on anything out there, to your knowledge? We know they went looking at property. He has said --

MR. NESSEN: Casually.

Q Has he asked for a hold on any piece of property saying, "We are interested in this, can you hold it"?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he has not.

Q What is the office number?

MR. NESSEN: Of Previews?

Q Is it the Virginia office?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that, Phil. You could either get it out of the phone book or Bob Barrett could probably provide you with additional details. As you know, he is handling the personal affairs of the Fords after the January 20th period.

Q Ron, is somebody going to give him some property in Palm Springs?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of it.

Q Are they going to give him access to some?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean by that?

Q Let him live in it for a while until he maybe decides he wants to buy it?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard anything like that, Sarah.

Q Do we have anything new on occupational interest after January 20?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Does this indicate he won't stay in the Washington area for sure?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate that he will have

a permanent home in Washington.

Q Ron, since the President has shown such an obvious interest in a smooth transition, has he set up any arrangement whereby budget matters might be consulted, there might be consultation back and forth between this Administration and the next one to minimize the number of changes that might be made?

MR. NESSEN: I think, Howard, we have gone over this ground pretty thoroughly. The answer has been and is that the President has the responsibility for preparing and presenting a budget for the next fiscal year.

He is going to do that; is in the process of doing that. At the same time he is going to make all the information that the Carter people want available to them. Our understanding is that the Carter people are working in kind of a parallel situation with the Congressional Budget Committee.

But as the President has said himself, yes, we are going to have a smooth transition and are having a smooth transition. But at the same time, he is the President with the full responsibility until noon on January 20th, which includes the responsibility for preparing a budget. And he is.

Q Did you find out about why the Carter people were denied permission to sit in on the budget sessions?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if it was a denial of permission to sit in on the budget sessions. This is the President's budget. He is going to prepare it. Any information wanted is being provided to the Carter people.

Q Did you check on that?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't check on the specific point of whether they had asked for it and not been allowed to sit in.

Q There has been some indication in some of the departments and agencies that as they make this budget the Republican people are thinking about the future of the party, are thinking about making a record here. Is the budget going to be more liberal, less liberal because of the idea that they are making a record here?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of anything like that, Sarah.

Q Ron, I have a couple more real estate questions. Does the President still have a mortgage on this house in Alexandria?

MR. NESSEN: If there are going to be a lot of questions on this, I am going to do more research. Because I didn't anticipate there would be a lot of questions, I didn't do much checking.

Q Does he intend to keep his condominium in Vail?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he does.

Q Has the President expressed any reaction on the statement made by Mr. Breshnev concerning the U. S.-Soviet relations?

MR. NESSEN: Not really anything from the President, no.

Q Ron, do you have anything from the White House or the President on the steel price increases?

MR. NESSEN: No. That really hasn't changed any. This particular set of price increases is being handled as others have been, through the Council on Wage and Price Stability. I understand that the staff of the Council at the request of the Economic Policy Board is gathering together all the facts.

They have not collected that yet and when they do they will make it public as they have in the past.

Q They haven't sent any message or judgment to the President?

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MR. NESSEN: Their fact-gathering is not completed yet.

Q Ron, they were supposed to issue a statement today, and this was cancelled. Did the White House have anything to do with the cancellation of this?

MR. NESSEN: It did not. My understanding is that if there was, indeed, any public statement planned today that the staff has simply not completed its fact-finding.

Q Has Mr. Lilley talked with the President in the last few days?

MR. NESSEN: He has not.

Q Has the President prepared a report on the implementation of the Helsinki agreement for the Congress?

MR. NESSEN: It is in the works. I am told it is being prepared.

Q I wonder when he will have it?

MR. NESSEN: We will check it for you.

Q Can we ask if the President has any views on steel personally? Is he just sitting back and saying, "I am going to wait until the facts are in," or does he have any personal views that you could share with us now that perhaps the steel price increase is justified or that it is unjustified, or is he just saying, "I am not going to touch it"?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I think we will have to take the position that until all the facts are in we are not going to have anything to say about it.

Q Does the President still oppose the general style of jaw-boning in cases like this?

MR. NESSEN: It is difficult to answer that question, Phil, in the context that we are talking about a specific steel price increase and then you are asking me a more general question about jaw-boning.

I would like to try to answer it, if I may, as a general question of his general views on the matter rather than relate it to the steel price increase, but, yes, he as a general matter does not believe that jaw-boning is an effective way to combat inflation.

Q Could I ask this: The White House is taking the position that you want to wait until all the facts are in to see whether this has increased or not increased, but Lilley of the Council on Wage and Price Stability has already said that the President's own arm in this matter, the Wage and Price Council, has already said it is not justifiable.

Does the President disagree? He obviously disagrees, doesn't he, with his own Wage and Price Council?

MR. NESSEN: I did not --

Q It was in the Washington Post. It was a lead in the Washington Post yesterday, front page.

MR. NESSEN: Walt, until the facts are in, we are not going to say anything on the steel price.

Q Isn't it perfectly obvious that the President disagrees or that he does not yet agree with Lilley and his own Wage and Price Council, because they have taken the position that the steel price increase is unjustified? Why does the President not concur with that opinion?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that they have taken that position. After all, what we have here now is the staff of the Council gathering facts together. When they have all the facts together they will publish them.

Q Any indication when that will be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: There is not.

Q Why didn't they have the facts together already, before the situation even arose? It certainly was a situation there that demanded their attention.

MR. NESSEN: No. What they are doing, Sarah, is gathering together the facts on a very specific steel price increase, and I think several more questions came in --

Q That doesn't mean the problem didn't exist before that. If they were on their toes, it looks like they would already know.

MR. NESSEN: Phil?

Q Obviously something happened. All we are trying to find out is what happened, because Lilley did have a news conference scheduled for today. They did indicate that it was going to be for the preliminary findings on this, and then all of a sudden this morning it is cancelled.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You will have to ask Lilley. After all, you know, as I say, this is --

Q You said you had talked with Lilley.

MR. NESSEN: No. I said I talked to Bill Seidman, in order to ask a lot of these questions, and the answer is that the study, the fact-gathering, is not complete. Whether it is because some additional steel companies have raised prices fairly recently or not, that is something you need to talk to Lilley about. But it is at the level of the staff of the Council gathering the facts.

Q You have no idea why Lilley cancelled it?

MR. NESSEN: Only that the fact-gathering is not yet complete, Chuck.



Q Has the President talked with Mr. Whyte about the steel price increase? U.S. Steel is one of the companies involved. Mr. Whyte is the chief lobbyist for U.S. Steel.

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he has not.

Q Is this the same Mr. Whyte the President played golf with?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is.

Q Did the EFB suggest that the fact-finding had not been completed and urge the Council to do more fact-finding?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge. I don't think that is the way it flows, Phil.

Q Carter has already indicated he was concerned about those steel price increases. Is the President at least concerned about them?

MR. NESSEN: I am just simply not going to say anything about it until the facts are in. That is the way every price increase in the past has been handled and that is the way this one is going to be handled.

Q Let me ask you this: Are Mr. Lilley's remarks considered here to be premature?

MR. NESSEN: Ralph, this is being done just like every other price increase. The staff of the Council is gathering facts. They will make them public. They will send their facts over to the Economic Policy Board. I am not going to make any judgments or comments until that is done.

Q I asked you that simply because Mr. Lilley has made a statement.

MR. NESSEN: I see that, or I have been told that, although I didn't see the statement.

Q Does not the President consider this an economic emergency?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, as I said, I am not going to say anything until the facts get here.

Q But it is a fair conclusion that the President is reserving judgment on this matter until the facts are in?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to say anything until the facts get here.

Q Would the President like Mr. Carter to handle this, since the economic impact is going to fall primarily on his administration?

MR. NESSEN: The President has the full responsibility until noon on January 20th, Tom.

Q Have any of the steel executives asked to meet with the President?

MR. NESSEN: They have not.

Q Can you assure us that there was no pressure or no word put out to the Council to hold up on this preliminary report for any reason until they got more facts in, or can you assure us that there was no communication from the White House to the Council to delay this thing today?

MR. NESSEN: I can assure you that I have never heard anything like that, and I don't quite understand why there would be any such thing. I know that partly at my request Bill Seidman got a progress report together for me so that I could answer these questions, and the progress report was that the facts were not all in yet.

Q That is exactly it. You said, "I don't see how it could be." That is exactly it. It could be a communication. Look, you have the steel companies that came in late this week, the three additional. You don't have their information. Let's wait until you get all of that, put it with the earlier ones and then have the preliminary report.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of that, Phil. But Lilley is certainly available and Bill Seidman is available. You could pursue that with them. I haven't heard of anything like that.

Q Does the President feel Mr. Carter is out of line in dabbling in the President's area of responsibility?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, when the question was asked yesterday I said what I said about two weeks ago, which is that from here on down to January 20th I am not going to comment on Mr. Carter's actions or statements. I said that, I guess, the day after the election.

Q Ron, during the summertime the President said he would cut back on beef imports. The Washington Post this morning said that the Administration is going to ask Australia to voluntarily cut back on imports. This is very important. This has gone on for two or three years with the farmers and cattle breeders, particularly in the Midwest, in asking for this relief and nothing has really been done for them.

MR. NESSEN: I lost track of that one a couple of months ago.

MS. EARL: We put out a proclamation that lasted through the end of 1976. Then we go back to requesting that it be voluntary.

MR. NESSEN: Could you talk to Margaret? I kept up with that for a while and sort of lost track of the action taken.

Q Any comment on the fact that the economic indicators have steadied up after two months of decline?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to Alan Greenspan and he basically didn't have any particular comment to make on those indicators.

Q Gordon Liddy's lawyers say they are going to try for a pardon for the President.

MR. NESSEN: For who?

Q Excuse me; a pardon from the President for their client, and my question is: Is the President devoting any attention these days to any pardons or does he anticipate any pardons for any of the people involved in Watergate before he goes out of office?

MR. NESSEN: As always, Walt, if there are any requests from anybody for pardons, they go through the routine Justice Department procedure.

Q My next question is: Have any of those requests for pardon gone through the Justice Department and been forwarded with recommendations one way or the other to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of any, but I will look it up.

Q Ron, in that connection, what about pardons of anybody? About this season of the year the Justice Department does send them to the White House for action. Have you gotten any of these yet?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen any. I will check on it.

Q When you do get them, will you let us know?

Q Have you received requests from the House Ethics Committee for the Justice Department to help in the investigation of the South Korean influence peddling?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. The letter has arrived. It is in the Counsel's office, Mr. Buchen's office. A reply will be prepared. What the reply will be has not been decided yet.

Q Any timing on it?

MR. NESSEN: No. Do you mean when will the decision be made and a response sent? I can't guess at that.

Q What did the letter say, Ron? Tell us again.

MR. NESSEN: I haven't read the full text of it, Sarah, but I think Congressman Flynt more or less made the letter public himself; Spence and Flynt, I think, were the two Congressmen.

Q Were you able to check for me on that issue of Federal funds for abortion, that study?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to Jim Cannon right after you asked me that question. He was going to get back with me with a progress report on it. He has not. I will follow it up.

Q Ron, anything further today on the President's thoughts about a coordinating committee as an adjunct to the Republican National Committee?

MR. NESSEN: No, none further than the views I expressed the other day.

Q Has he discussed it subsequent to your comments with members of the Republican Governors or any of their representatives?

MR. NESSEN: The way that meeting went the other night, it was really very informal. There were no formal remarks, and the President really strolled around the room and talked to the individual Governors. I obviously did not eavesdrop on every conversation, so I don't know whether he discussed it there or in connection with the --

Q There is no formal effort to push this idea forward, as far as you know?

MR. NESSEN: Not on his part, no.

Q Did the President have any discussions with Secretary Simon about the expenses that he incurred on his trip to Moscow? Did he ask Simon not to go to Mexico City?

MR. NESSEN: I don't believe he has talked to Bill Simon since he has been back on any subject.

Q Did he send him word enroute? Did he talk to him before he went?

MR. NESSEN: On what subject?

Q The subjects I just asked about.

MR. NESSEN: I think we have been asked before why did Secretary Simon go on this trip and I think we have explained before that these were --

Q I asked, did the President talk to him about the expenses to the taxpayers that he incurred on this trip and did he ask him not to go to Mexico City?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he did not talk to the Secretary about any expenses of the trip, since this trip has been planned for over a year. He is the honorary director of this Trade Council. It is customary to address the meeting. So I don't know what the reason would be for a discussion of expenses. I have not heard of any discussion with Bill Simon about going to Mexico City for the inauguration. He did not go, is my understanding.

Q Does the President have any words of wisdom, any additional words of wisdom on who the Republican Chairman should be or the type of person he should be when they meet in January to elect?

MR. NESSEN: No. He has not come out for any individual or any particular description of the individual.

Q What are the President's weekend plans?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know he is going to be here.

Q Also, is there a Venezuelan diplomat coming in to talk about OPEC price increases today?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see it, if he is. With the President?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen it.

Q While we are on that, do you expect the President to say anything to discourage an OPEC oil price hike? I asked you this a couple of weeks ago.

MR. NESSEN: I know. It is difficult to know how to answer that question. Obviously, we have stated publicly and repeatedly that we do not believe an OPEC oil price increase is justified on purely economic grounds, that the Arabs are not producing anywhere near capacity and therefore, no increase is justified.

You asked me what are we doing. I would have to say that we are doing, we are at least talking privately to some people about the problem. But I just think to go any further in that in public would defeat the purpose of the private efforts.

Q Ron, does the President feel that the proposed increases in steel prices would trigger an OPEC increase?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, again, until the facts are in, I am just not going to talk about the steel price increase.

Q Is this one of the questions that he is looking at?

MR. NESSEN: Until the staff of the Wage and Price Council send their findings here or make their findings public, I don't think I am going to comment.

Q Does the President have any comment to make about John Connally's speech when he said we had no energy policy and no food and fiber policy?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any comment, no. I would like to read the speeches and see what he said.

Q Several days ago, Ron, didn't you read it then?

MR. NESSEN: I did not read that aspect of it, no.

Q Will we have a briefing tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Monday, Wednesday and Friday we had talked about for this week.

END

(AT 11:00 A.M. EST)