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NEWS CONFERENCE

#607

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:34 A.M. EST

DECEMBER 6, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: You saw the arrival ceremony of Prime Minister Andreotti. We will have at least a written report on the meeting of the President and the Prime Minister, probably around 12:30 or 1:00 o'clock. I would think it would be just as well to perhaps not put the lid on until we have issued that statement.

Q Is he going to meet him tomorrow, too?

MR. NESSEN: No. Today is the only day.

As you know, the black tie dinner tonight, and that will be the normal procedures for that.

I can give you a report on the meeting with the Republican National Committee group this morning, if you want to hear it. I think some of the members were interviewed as they left.

The President began by thanking the people who were there for their help in the campaign and again mentioned, as he has on other occasions, the fact that he had started quite far back and came very close to winning.

He again indicated his support for the idea of some kind of Republican coordinating committee. He recalled that such a committee was set up after the 1964 election, and Ray Bliss, who was sitting across the table from him -- he referred to Ray Bliss as the Chairman of this coordinating committee in '64 or '65.

He recalled that he and Everett Dirksen had played leading roles in it and said that the organization was a start toward the election successes of 1966 and 1968. And he recalled even some of the details of it -- the fact that it met quarterly, that it had representatives of the governors, State legislators, mayors, House and Senate, former Presidents, and so forth -- and said it was one of the reasons for what he called the good comeback of 1966 and 1968.

So, as I say, he once again indicated that he really favored that idea.

He said that at that point and later that he thought it was important to begin to find good candidates now to run in 1968 at all levels -- governor, Senator,

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House members and local offices; that the party should not wait until just before the elections of '78, but should begin to identify candidates now and get behind them and help them to get their campaigns started ahead of time.

Then as for his own role in the party -- on that point he said it was especially important to work to have Republicans elected to State legislatures, because they would take part in the redistricting process that will be going on in many States, and that this will lay the groundwork for gains in the House of Representatives in 1978 and 1980.

Then on his own role he said, "To the degree I can be helpful, I will be in there working with you on something I believe in very deeply. We have to have an organization as well as principles. So the Republican National Committee has a significant role in 1978 and 1980."

Then, continuing on his own role in the future, he says, "I have dedicated 28 years of my life to the principles I believe in. I don't intend to sit on the sidelines. I am looking forward to an exciting period ahead." There, he meant in his own life.

Then he said that the stories which have appeared, suggesting that he is recluse or depressed or whatever, are just not true.

Q Ron, would you mind repeating that phrase, "I have dedicated 28 years," just the last part?

MR. NESSEN: Actually, the way it was worded was, "Having dedicated 28 years of my life to the principles I believe in, I don't intend to sit on the sidelines. I am looking forward to an exciting period ahead." That is the end of the quote.

And from there he went on to say the stories suggesting he is depressed or a recluse are just not true.

Then there were some various others around the table who spoke up about his Presidency and his campaign and future, and then he repeated there that we need to go out now and get good candidates who will go out and work for the next 18 months. "We can gain in the Senate, House, governorships and State legislators, and we have to help them," meaning the Republican National Committee.

Then he praised Mary Louise Smith, saying that she did a superior job in very difficult circumstances. And he said that in looking to the future of the Republican National Committee, it was important to find a consensus and to not have sharp divisions in the Republican National Committee.

Then there were some other contributions, and finally the President ended his remarks by saying that the Republican Party really needs to strengthen itself. As he put it, "We must strengthen our part of the two-party system in every State." He went on and talked about not

letting the Republican Party deteriorate to the point where there was in fact a one-party system, either nationally or in individual States. And he also spoke against the multi-party system and pointed out that in some countries where there is a multi-party system, it was not an effective form of government.

That, basically, I think, gives you a pretty complete report.

Q He said in what countries?

MR. NESSEN: Paraphrasing the President.

Q He said in countries in which there are multi-parties?

MR. NESSEN: Yes; the government is not as effective as where there is a two-party system.

Q Which countries?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't cite any specific ones.

Q You mean all countries?

MR. NESSEN: No. He said there are countries where there are multi-party systems.

Q Has he gone any further in his thinking of how this committee ought to be structured and what precisely it ought to do?

MR. NESSEN: If he did, he didn't talk about it today, where I think he logically would have if he had gone any further. He does harken back to '64 and cites frequently the membership then. So I think he has the same sort of --

Q He mentioned again the 1964-1965 committee and its membership. Does he think that now, as then, there ought to be an official place on this committee for all former Presidents?

MR. NESSEN: I see what you are driving at, Ed.

Q There will be two, come January 20th.

MR. NESSEN: He has not specified.

Q Does he think Richard Nixon ought to have a place?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. He hasn't said.

Q Has he closed the door on the possibility of him running for any office in the future?

MR. NESSEN: He doesn't have any plans to run for office in the future.

Q Ron, since you made it clear that the President has denied this report that he is a recluse, that story in Newsweek also said that he very much dislikes Jimmy Carter. Did he say anything to indicate that this is wrong, too, or that he likes Jimmy Carter or what?

MR. NESSEN: I think last week when you asked that question, Les --

Q I didn't get an answer last week, Ron, and neither did Phil Jones.

MR. NESSEN: I think you did. The answer I gave then was that I think by his own contribution and by the directions he has given to his Administration on how he expects the transition to be conducted, and on the tone of his own meeting with Jimmy Carter, I think his attitude toward Jimmy Carter has been demonstrated.

Q Ron, if I could follow that up by saying this: He specifically said this morning that reports that he is a recluse are wrong. In other words, in answer to my question he did not say himself that reports that he dislikes Jimmy Carter are wrong; is that right?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would rather give you, as I have twice now --

Q A non-answer.

MR. NESSEN: -- I would rather give you now the things he has done which demonstrate, I think, his relationship and views of Jimmy Carter.

Q Sure. I understand. I appreciate that. But you just didn't; in other words, he didn't say anything about whether he likes Jimmy or doesn't like Jimmy. Did he?

MR. NESSEN: Again, Les, we can go through this again. The fact is that the President has met Jimmy Carter, has given directions to everybody in the Administration, and himself has played a role in the transition. And that being the relationship at the moment between the two men, I think it demonstrates the President's view of Mr. Carter.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to Governor Reagan saying that he could have beaten Jimmy Carter?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really have any reaction to that, Dick. I don't expect to.

Q Without wishing to beat this thing further to death on Carter, the President's feelings for Carter, you seem to be suggesting that it is a rather formal feeling that he has toward him. You are not injecting, taking the opportunity to inject any personal regard on the President's part. Can you do that?

MR. NESSEN: I think we are going around the bush here looking for something that isn't there.

Q The report specifically said he disliked him.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Last week when I was asked I said the same thing. Today when I was asked --

Q Which really leaves the door open to the possibility he does dislike him.

MR. NESSEN: If you see that door being opened --

Q Why don't you shut it?

MR. NESSEN: As I told Les, and I will tell you, the President has demonstrated his attitude toward Jimmy Carter by his own meeting with Mr. Carter and his instructions to his Administration on how to conduct the transition.

Q He would do that for Idi Amin if he came here. Isn't that true? Wouldn't he receive Field Marshal Amin with all of the amenities and courtesies that you say indicate that he really loves or is fond of Jimmy? Ron, why not just close the door; say he didn't say it or he did say it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that Field Marshal Amin is, although he has offered himself as king --

Q No. He said he wants to come to the United States.

Q Was the successor to Mary Louise Smith discussed in the meeting today?

MR. NESSEN: Only in general terms.

Q Who was discussed in general terms?

MR. NESSEN: No person was discussed in general terms, Dick, but when I said earlier in my little readout of the meeting that the President made some remarks concerning the need to have a solution to the problems of the RNC through a consensus and not a way that created divisions in the party, that was on the specific point of who the chairman would be.

Q So the President prefers somebody who is not a candidate for higher office?

MR. NESSEN: No. I don't read that into it.

Q Ron, what do you read into the term "consensus"? For example, does it mean that the President would prefer someone who is not clearly identified with either one wing of the party or one particular potential presidential candidate of the party? Does it mean that?

MR. NESSEN: At this point, Ed, I don't really have anything to add to the President's views on that. He didn't have anything to add to it today in talking to that group.

Q Will he have something to say?

MR. NESSEN: He wouldn't give any names.

Q No name?

MR. NESSEN: Look, I am not going to go beyond what he told this private meeting. What he told the private meeting was that he hoped that that and other matters

involving the RNC could be resolved through a consensus or through a way that did not divide the RNC. Since that is as far as he went, that is as far as I am going to go.

Q Has the President indicated to you the kind of person he thinks would be an appropriate chairman at this time?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has not.

Q Ron, he seemed to in that --

MR. NESSEN: He has not referred to anybody.

Q In the consensus statement he seemed to be warning about going too far to either extreme, to stay in the middle, stay broad-based when it comes to picking a new chairman. Did he make a similar statement about the future of the party itself generally?

MR. NESSEN: I went through my notes here pretty thoroughly, Walt. He did talk about the need to have a strong party so it could play its part in the two-party system. I know what you are driving at, but today he did not talk on that point.

Q Did he say anything which suggested that the Republican Party itself needs to broaden its political base and incorporate greater numbers or embrace greater numbers and a wider philosophy?

MR. NESSEN: That did not come up today; no.

Q What did the President mean when he said he didn't intend to sit on the sidelines?

MR. NESSEN: It means he intends to stay active in the Republican Party affairs, as I mentioned.

Q He didn't go into any detail?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Richard Rosenbaum outside said that the President said that if this Coordinating Committee were set up, he would play an active role in it.

MR. NESSEN: I would expect he would.

Q You had not said that, I don't think before, as I recall, when you first told us about his feeling on this. Did the President in fact say, as Rosenbaum suggested, that he would.

MR. NESSEN: I think he said it by indirection, Dick. He didn't come right out and say, "I am ready, willing and anxious to play a role in this committee," but he cited his service on the '65 committee and then he went right into the idea that, "To the degree I can be helpful, I will be in there working with you," and so forth.

Q For the first time that I recall, the President has indicated through you that he has no plans for running for office again. I asked you that same question about two weeks ago. You said at the time there were no plans one way or the other.

My question is: Could you tell us a little bit more about the context in which he said he had no plans to run for office?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't say that today. I am just telling you that I know that right now he has no plans to run for office.

Q You qualified it, "right now."

MR. NESSEN: I am saying the same thing I said two weeks ago when I said he had no plans to run for office. Today I said he has no plans to run for office. I wouldn't read anything secret into that.

Q Did the President happen to make any comments on the results of the Japanese election?

MR. NESSEN: No. It is an internal Japanese matter. We wouldn't have any comment on it.

Q What about the Lockheed part?

MR. NESSEN: How do you separate that out?

Q Lockheed is an American corporation.

MR. NESSEN: You know the steps the President has taken in the past to work out agreements for necessary information and so forth, but I don't have any comment.

Q Did anybody in this meeting, or has anyone in the Republican Party, questioned the propriety of Secretary Simon making what I understand was an unofficial trip to Moscow and Mexico City with his family?

MR. NESSEN: Why would they be unofficial trips?

Q As I understand it, they were. Or am I wrong? If they were official, was he going on behalf of the President?

MR. NESSEN: He is the chairman of the Trade Commission. I think you know that. He has spoken to that group at the previous meetings and this was scheduled a long time ago. So he went on that business.

He also stopped in England to transact business there, too.

Q How about Mexico City?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't go to Mexico City.

Q Ron, why is Richardson in?

MR. NESSEN: Richardson called last week after he had been to the earthquake area and to some other places and indicated that he wanted to give the President a report on both the earthquake and his other stops, and the meeting was arranged for that reason.

Q Does President Ford plan to play a personally active role in determining the consensus chairman to replace Mary Louise Smith?

MR. NESSEN: He hasn't decided yet what personal role he will play in the selection of the new chairman.

Q Does he intend to sit on the sidelines or does he intend to be a part of it?

MR. NESSEN: He hasn't decided what role he is going to play in it.

Q In the talk with Mr. Andreotti, who is in on the American side?

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Kissinger, General Scowcroft and Ambassador Volpe.

Q The general election was held in Japan yesterday and the ruling party was rebuffed by the Liberal Democratic Party. Do you have anything to say on that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is proper to comment on the international political activities of another country.

Q Ron, one housekeeping question. Are you going back to NBC or where will you be going after the 20th?

MR. NESSEN: I have not yet decided, Les. I am weighing a number of attractive offers. WAVA, I understand, is looking for a new White House correspondent. I may apply for that.

(Laughter)

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

AT 11:55 P.M. EST

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