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**Business
 Finance**

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REPORT

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The Greer/Kandel Report

Lecture Agents Seek Ford Aides

By Phillip Greer and Myron Kandel

Special to The Washington Star

Officials of the outgoing Ford administration aren't getting much of a reception from the lucrative lecture circuit so far, even though agents are scurrying around Washington trying to sign them to exclusive contracts. Up to now the reaction from the people who book speakers for college campuses, conventions and fund-raising dinners has been a large yawn.

"I can't think of anybody in the Ford crowd — other than the President or Secretary of State Kissinger — who could command the kind of money that's being asked," a top official of a fund-raising organization told us. "They're all so bland."

EVEN SO, the demand for fresh faces on the lecture circuit — estimated to gross \$100 million a year — is so pressing that the agents are quoting big numbers to Washington officials as they try to lure them into the fold. One cabinet member has told friends he has been quoted \$5,000 per appearance. Several others mention figures only slightly lower.

Most of the agents we've spoken to say it would be bad form to discuss the names of the administration officials they've contacted, much less to try to get them speaking engagements while they're still on Uncle Sam's payroll.

"It shouldn't be done until after Jan. 20," says the dean of the lecture business, W. Colston Leigh, who at 75 still spends part time in his New York office.

But Harry Walker, Inc. of New York, one of the biggest agencies in the lecture field, which long has numbered some of the country's leading political figures among its clients, is already trying to drum up business for at least two administration officials — energy czar Frank Zarb and White House press secretary Ron Nessen.

IN RECENT DAYS, the agency has sent out flyers advertising the availability of both men after they leave office. Nessen, for example, is listed as being willing to talk on two subjects: "What I think of the press" and "My two years in the White House." Since then, a third subject has been added

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to appeal to business audiences: "Dealing with the press, from a man who has been on both sides."

Nessen, a former NBC correspondent, told us the Walker firm represented him before he joined the White House staff and would do so after he leaves. "I haven't signed anything new," he said. "I've just told them I'm back on the market."

Harry Walker, who started his agency 30 years ago, noted that Nessen signed a new contract with him just two weeks before being named Ford's press secretary. It became "inoperative" while he was working in the White House, Walker said. "As a matter of fact," he added, "we renewed our contract with Gerald Ford about a month before he became vice president. That one also became inoperative."

Walker, who says he doesn't like to talk about his clients, told us he represented Ford for most of the years he was in Congress. "He's a very dear and close personal friend," he said.

NESSEN SAYS he doesn't know if his boss, President Ford, will take to the lecture circuit when he becomes a private citizen. The lecture people tend to doubt it, although most of them say the President could receive high fees if he did. Walker won't say whether he has approached the President. "I don't know if an ex-president gets this kind of representation," he said. "It's a ticklish proposition." (The Star reported last week that President and Mrs. Ford have picked the William Morris Theatrical Agency to negotiate literary rights to their memoirs and any "spinoffs," such as television appearances.)

A lecture agent who's willing to talk more frankly about the business is New York-based Richard Fulton, who cautioned that some in the field try to line up lecture dates for prominent speakers before having them under contract.

He said the only members of the outgoing administration who interest him are Ford and Kissinger. "But they are going to make so much money on the books they write," he said. "Why should they give away what they have to say?"

LYNDON JOHNSON'S experience helps support this view. Johnson made his first paid lecture in November 1971, nearly three years after leaving the presidency and only after his book, "The Vantage Point," was published.

In fact, one reporter writing about the event — which was sponsored by the Wall Street house of Salomon Brothers at the New York University Graduate School of Business — noted that the former president carefully placed a copy of the book on a front corner of the lectern, "where it couldn't be missed by his audience and the TV camera."

Johnson, by the way, received what may be the largest fee ever paid for one lecture — \$25,000 — which he donated for college scholarships in Texas.

Ron Nessen Departing Without Rancor

BY ROBERT BARKDOLL
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—Shortly before White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen's news briefing the other day, two television technicians slouching on a divan in the rear of the room had a brief exchange.

"Where are all the antagonizers today?"

"Down in Plains."

"Then this ain't gonna be very entertaining, is it?"

It wasn't. Indeed the briefing was sleepily calm. Absent were many of Nessen's antagonists, the bearbaiters of the press who are already abandoning the Ford White House to stalk President-elect Jimmy Carter and his men.

In his office later, the 41-year-old press secretary, long known for his flashing temper, looked back over past battles with "a tiny minority" of Washington newsmen and volunteered that he would leave his job Jan. 20 with rancor toward none.

"Whatever little personal angers I have are going to fade a week after I leave this place," he mused.

But when questioned he came down hard, albeit apologetically, on the television industry in general, and to a lesser extent on the print press, for sins of omission and commission in their reporting.

In so doing, he extended a bit of sympathy to Carter.

In the eyes of Nessen, a 12-year veteran with NBC before he became presidential press secretary, the incoming President has already been a victim of one press-television shortcoming suffered by President Ford: a tendency by the industry to concentrate on trivia at the expense of important news.

"A for-instance? Well, lock, did you see the time devoted to Amy Carter's school? My God!"

Nessen's scorn was prompted by an ABC-TV news show he saw in which Barbara Walters interviewed Rosalynn Carter about Amy's new school, then another correspondent read an open letter to Amy—"Dear Amy, I want to show you your school . . ." and "then Barbara Walters came back with more tidbits from Plains.

"That was about five minutes of a nightly television news show devoted to Amy and her school. That is a hell of a big hunk of news. You only have 22 minutes of news altogether (and)

you give about 20% of it to Amy's school.

"Imagine how Mr. Carter feels. Here he is putting a government together, trying to deal with serious issues, and there are a lot of serious problems, and what gets on television at great length—his daughter's school."

To bolster his claim that the public is getting shortchanged, Nessen also cited television handling of a slip of the tongue by Ford during an election campaign appearance at Iowa State University.

The President opened by saying that he was glad to be at "Ohio State," apologized to the Iowa State audience for the error, then delivered the major farm speech of his election campaign, Nessen recalled.

"All the television networks used that piece of film, a meaningless slip of the tongue, instead of, or in place of, some coverage of his serious remarks on farm policy," he said.

Lest he appear to be "loading it onto the (news) broadcasters," Nessen said he recognized that they have what he called structural problems—a strict time limit on the amount of news they can present—and are the victims of a fierce competitive battle.

As for newspapers, he thought their shortcomings were fewer, since for the most part there seems to be space for, and a general devotion to, more serious news. But they have their problems too, he said, indicating again that he thinks the public is the loser.

For example:

"I'd hate to be one in a position of defending Wayne Hays," he said, "but after months and months of all those stories about how he hired Elizabeth Ray to be his mistress and for no other reason, and all those jokes about 'I can't type, I can't file, I can't even answer the phone,' the Justice Department says last week there's no evidence of that.

"So there's a three- or four-paragraph story, and it's all over. But meanwhile what happened to all those months and months of stories that said she was hired for one reason only, to be his mistress?"

Nessen, who was a rewrite and desk man for United Press International for six years before going to NBC in 1962, said there had been a shift away from the objectivity of those days in journalism, with an accompanying encroachment on the rights of persons accused of crimes.

"There's been a gradual loosening of the rather strict rules we operated under at UPI about what you could suggest, imply or allege about a guy under suspicion," he said. "We bent over backwards to be fair, not to suggest he was guilty until (so proven)."

He attributed this relaxation in part to "a series of unbelievable events"—Vietnam, Watergate, assassination plots, CIA-FBI revelations—until the feeling among newsmen is that "no allegation is too outlandish to be true, so you'd better get a story on the record because it could turn out to be true."

Nessen disclosed that he had talked to his Carter Administration successor, Jody Powell, about reforming the White House briefing system by which most major Washington news flows from the executive mansion.

Nessen proposed that this system be drastically revised, with far more information issued by the various government departments directly responsible for it. That's where the experts are, he said, and that's where the news should come from.

What's more, he added, the White House briefing system has become a

Washington ritual "around which 30 or 40 news people build their day," often writing stories when the briefing actually produced none.

"So many days I've seen stories that said 'Nessen disclosed today, or revealed today, or announced today,' when I hadn't done a damn thing but reiterate what had been said every day for the past three months. But there was nothing else that day so it produced a story."

It is at the briefings that Nessen and other White House press secretaries, going back at least to the days of George E. Reedy in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, have been subjected to harangues by some newsmen.

While they are a small minority, Nessen noted, they monopolize the sessions with argumentative questions to such an extent that "a good many serious reporters walk out of here every day shaking their heads" in disgust.

Nessen, who said he hoped to return to journalism, predicted that his critics would be disappointed if they expected him to "come out of here roaring" at the press. What he hopes to do, he said, is draw on his dual experience as newsmen and press secretary to offer some constructive proposals for improving White House press relations.