

The original documents are located in Box 299, folder “Chastisement of Media in Briefing - Reporters' Suggestions” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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MORNING

EVENING

SUNDAY

THE SUN

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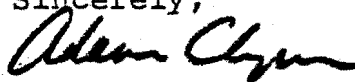
June 26, 1975

Dear Ron,

Jim Naughton told me today that on June 4 at West Point you did mention to him the necessity of President Ford's reading the Rockefeller Report and deciding to release it before it could be made public -- an element you did not raise with me at about the same time.

Therefore I apologize for saying during the June 6 briefing "I think you are a liar," in reference to your statement that that precondition had been in your mind when you discussed the details of releasing that report. I apologize also for any inconvenience or distress this may have caused you.

Sincerely,



Adam Clymer



FROM.....

Forrest Boyd

MUTUAL AT THE WHITE HOUSE

~~SECRET~~

June 26, 1975

Ron:

In my opinion, one way not
to improve the information system
is to continue to hold briefings
with a selected group of reporters.

- Forrest





RKO GENERAL BROADCASTING

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VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON NEWS BUREAU

June 27, 1975

The Honorable Gerald R. Ford
President
The United State of America
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I have been a White House "regular" since 1967, so I have known a number of Presidential Press Secretaries.

From that vantage point, I would like you to know how at least one White House Correspondent views Ron Nessen.

In my opinion, his Credibility is high and his Integrity unflawed. He has instituted changes for the better in the White House Press Office operation and in my day-to-day relationship with him, he has proven to be cooperative.

Of course he is not perfect. But, then, Mr. President, who is, except for me and thee -- and I'm not certain...!

As always,

With deep regard,

Clifford Evans

CE/rem



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July 3, 1975

Dear Mr. de Toledano:

Thank you for sending your views on my recent comments about a small group of reporters at my daily press briefing.

I am glad to have your thoughts on this. I am sure you realize that my comments were in no way intended as a general criticism of the press. In fact, President Ford and his White House enjoy excellent relations with the press.

Since I made my comments, the atmosphere at my daily briefings has improved considerably and the briefings are now better serving their intended purpose, which is to provide a wealth of information on the President, his activities, and his policies to the American people.

Again, thank you for letting me know your thoughts on this issue which involves only a small part of the White House press relations, but nevertheless is important to the open flow of information to the American people which President Ford so strongly supports.

Sincerely,

Ron Nessen
Press Secretary
to the President

Mr. Ralph de Toledano
825 New Hampshire Avenue, NW.
Washington, D. C. 20037

RN:ckb
RN-14



RALPH de TOLEDANO 825 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE, N.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

JUL 02 1975

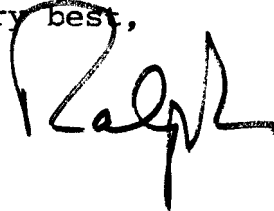
27 June 1975

Dear Ron:

Congratulations. What some of those
so-called newsmen deserve is a fat lip.

Don't let them get you down.

Very best,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ralph", with a stylized, flowing script.

Mr. Ron Nessen
The White House
Washington, D.C.





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Mr. Ron Nessen
The White House
Washington, D.C.

SUITE 601

825 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE, N.W.

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

PRESS ROOM
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



July 2, 1975

Dear Ron:

Rushing in where angels fear to, herewith unsolicited advice on briefing format.

Since I take it you are most concerned at the moment with attitudes and atmosphere, I suggest holding your briefings in your own office would accomplish wonders.

It would eliminate much of the circus air because, of necessity, you would have to bar visitors, at least in any number, and also (FOR LACK OF SPACE) photographers and cameramen. I would suggest also that whether you have an announcement to make or not, the afternoon briefing be resumed on a daily basis, in the same room.

While you are thinking about whether these ideas make any sense, I invite you to recall when and by whom and for what purpose the briefing room with all its gadgets was created. Not only does the room retain unwelcome bear-pit memories, it is not structured, in my opinion, for the kind of information program you say you want. While it is fine for filmed briefings by a Zarb, it ^{has} too many connotations of gimmickry and the assembly line to contribute to the kind of relationship I think you are seeking with newsmen.

Cheers *W. Sullivan*

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 24, 1975

Dear Grant:

I have just read your thoughtful and understanding comments in the UPI REPORTER about the troubles of a Press Secretary.

In your next to the last paragraph you made some suggestions of how to better conduct the daily briefing by not trying to be prepared to answer every question on every subject but to bring in expert guest briefers and to limit my operation to the mechanics of coverage, press releases, etc.

We have thought about and discussed this approach both at Camp David and even before. It has great appeal to me and to my staff. Unfortunately, we concluded that given the fact that the daily briefing, with questions on every conceivable subject has become a ritual, we feel it is just impossible to break the habit right now. Even my vague comment a few Thursdays ago that I might change the format of the briefing, brought a flood of published articles and outrage from the White House Press Corps. I feel the only way I can change the briefing in the direction I prefer to go, is gradually and almost unperceptably.

Anyhow, as always, I appreciate and respect your views and I hope that if you have other ideas about how to improve the Press Office operation you will get in touch. And even if you don't have any ideas, we can still get together for a drink now and then.

Whenever anyone complains about what a lousy Press Secretary I am, I always tell them you taught me everything I know!

Sincerely,

Ron Nessen
Press Secretary
to the President

Mr. Grant Dillman
Vice President & Washington Manager
UPI REPORTER
220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017



RN/pp

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DEAR RON:

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND THE ENCLOSED AT LEAST INTERESTING. IF NOT,
YOU'RE ENTITLED TO WHAT LYLE WILSON ALWAYS INSISTED DOESN'T EXIST -- A
FREE LUNCH.

BEST REGARDS,

Brant
GRANT



UPI REPORTER

United Press International, 220 East 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10017

Office of H. L. Stevenson, Editor-in-Chief and Vice President

July 10, 1975

WASHINGTON--Ron Nessen's "reforms" in White House briefing procedures ignored the most important question of all--can anyone be a satisfactory press secretary as the job is now defined? Further, do his daily sessions with reporters really serve the public and the press?

RON NESSEN'S APPROACH TO AN IMPOSSIBLE JOB

The changes, announced after a recent meeting between Nessen and his staff at Camp David, should be good news for afternoon newspaper editors. Among other things, the press office will start work a half hour earlier so the daily briefings can begin promptly at 11:30 a.m. EDT. If Nessen is not ready by then, someone else will start the briefing and he will take over when he arrives.

There also will be two daily postings of routine information about White House activities, one at 10 a.m. and another at 3:30 p.m., plus an overall summary at the end of the day. Consideration also is being given an afternoon briefing.

But none of these goes to the heart of the flap that preceded the Camp David meeting: Nessen's charge that undue cynicism on the part of some White House reporters was undermining the usefulness of the briefings.

"I think," he said, "that readers and viewers are badly served and, in fact, are misled when suspicions are raised about everything said here, when there is nothing to base those suspicions on except blind and irrational mistrust and cynical thinking habits that have built up over the past 10 years."

Lou Cannon of *The Washington Post*, who had a lengthy interview with Nessen a few days earlier, said the press secretary conceded some of his foreign policy answers "have been less than satisfactory." He said Nessen attributed this to the National Security Council's penchant for secrecy.

Cannon also quoted Nessen as saying the press had largely overlooked what Nessen regards as a major improvement in the quality of information provided by the White House and the press office on domestic issues.

But the question arises whether anyone has the mental capacity and the intimate knowledge necessary to stand up daily before 40 or 50 of the nation's toughest reporters and give meaningful answers to questions about the vast bureaucracy that is the United States government.

When cabinet members or top military leaders testify before Congress they are accompanied by aides armed with thick reference books which they hastily consult when lawmakers ask prickly questions. And they are presumed experts in relatively specialized areas.



Even the President sometimes encounters news conference questions he cannot answer, despite the intensive advance briefing he receives and the fact that he presumably has access to information not available to Nessen.

Yet the press secretary is expected to give meaningful answers to questions ranging--as they did the day Nessen announced his reforms--from Ford's Middle East policy to whether the United States might be the first to use atomic weapons, and from Ford's oil decontrol plan to whether the National Security Agency taps the telephones of Americans, plus a host of others.

No matter how early Nessen gets to work, and no matter how intensively he prepares himself, there is no way he can field every question thrown at him. It is beyond human capacity. As a result he frequently must gloss over issues reporters consider important or give half answers. Some questions he simply can't answer, for reasons of security or high policy.

That feeds the frustrations of the reporters, leading to the charges of liar and cover-up that Nessen decried.

There is a further consideration as far as press and public are concerned. If the press secretary says something that gets a cool reception, the President can always deny that is what he really meant. There is, in other words, a potential for trial balloons.

Perhaps it would be better for the President, the press and the public if the White House abandoned the idea of having an all-knowing official spokesman. Perhaps the press secretary could confine himself largely to the mechanics of press relations--handling the administration's pronouncements, seeing to the mechanics of presidential coverage, giving the President public relations advice, and helping reporters gain direct access to policy-makers.

Since presidents need access to the press as much as the press needs access to presidents, this might put pressure on the chief executive and his top aides to speak for themselves more often, putting their policies and attitudes on the public record in their own words for all to read and hear.

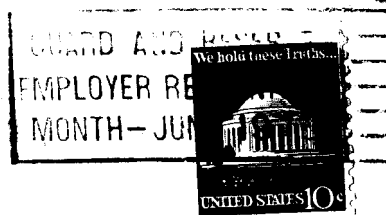


Grant Dillman
Grant Dillman
Vice President and Washington Manager

GD

United Press International

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Mr. Ron Nesser
Press Secretary to the President
The White House
Washington, D.C.