

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

HUGH SCOTT

SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

AND

JOHN J. RHODES

REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

THE BRIEFING ROOM

10:38 A.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: Gentlemen and ladies, the President has been meeting with Senator Scott and Congressman Rhodes. They basically discussed four topics, the new Sinai agreement, the status of energy legislation, the coming natural gas shortage and the revival of arms sales to Turkey. I will let the Senator and Congressman talk to you and answer your questions.

Q How long did they meet?

MR. NESSEN: Since 9:45, about 45 minutes.

SENATOR SCOTT: Welcome back. I did not travel at Government expense and I stayed within the United States. (Laughter)

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: Likewise. (Laughter)

SENATOR SCOTT: I wouldn't have said it if I hadn't been sure of that.

Ron, you have told them the topics.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, sir.

SENATOR SCOTT: My view is that we should cooperate right down the line with the Democratic leaders of the Senate and House, with Senator Mansfield and the Speaker who had suggested the meeting with the President out of which came an expression of desire on their part to have an extension of time, a short extension of the Emergency Petroleum Allocation Act and a compromise proposal which they undertook to do their best to get Democratic approval of, that is the 39-month period.

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(OVER)

The rest of the features you know about, although we can go into them if you want. I will certainly support that every way I can.

If the majority in the House and Senate can come up with some compromise like that, it is certainly in the public interest. If they can't, I think it would reflect very seriously on the ability of Congress to legislate.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I just want to reiterate what Senator Scott said about support of the plan as we understand. I am somewhat appalled by public announcements which have been attributed to certain key Members of the House and Senate that there is already this lack of approval of this method of approach. To me -- and I certainly found this out during the recess -- the people of the United States are tired of procrastination on the part of Congress in getting something done along the lines of energy and the least that could be expected would be the approval of some reasonable plan of decontrol. I am afraid we are headed back for the same swamp of indecision that we had before the August recess occurred and I hope that it will not occur and that political motivations would not be allowed to interfere with an action which is obviously for the best interest of the country in the opinion of practically everybody.

SENATOR SCOTT: Plus on the Middle East, the President will be meeting with Dr. Kissinger this evening and I would expect that Dr. Kissinger would testify before the appropriate House and Senate committees and the key is the volunteer civilian electronic surveillance force. There seems to be growing support for such a force. I, myself, would be against the use of a military force or against any weapons-bearing personnel of any kind whatsoever. But I think that a civilian volunteer force which will work with the Egyptians on the one part and with the Israelis on the other and independently on the third part as a part of their task will probably meet with majority approval of the Congress.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: There are certain risks involved in any participation such as this. There are parts to the agreement -- and I haven't seen the full text yet -- I am told which will require legislation on the part of the Congress and, again, I feel that the risks which are entailed in any such operation are counter-balanced completely by the necessity of establishing some sort of a peace in the Middle East.

In other words, it appears that the greatest risk would be to allow this situation to rock along and to have it develop into an actual shooting war, as has occurred so many times in that area.

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So I, for one, applaud the Secretary of State and the President for the agreement which they have brought forth and it would be my hope that the Congress would take whatever steps are necessary to implement it as soon as possible.

Q How much money is it going to cost the Federal Government?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: That, Helen, is part of the agreement which I have not become privy to. I am told, however, that the agreement may call for aid to Israel in the form of military equipment and also economic aid of some magnitude, in the billions.

Q Why haven't you been told?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I don't think there has been time has yet to have the agreement completely set forth and brought up to the Hill.

We are also told that there is provision for some aid to Egypt, so I think it would be premature for us to, not having been briefed on that phase of it, to comment any further, except to inform you, in case you needed to be informed, that there are elements involved which will call for a considerable outlay of funds.

Q Gentlemen, why is the Administration so insistent that these technicians be American, why couldn't they be from some other country?

SENATOR SCOTT: I have nothing against any other country but I assume that this was something which was acceptable to the Egyptians and the Israelis because of the technical expertise, the known advancement of Americans in this technological field. It is obvious that certain countries which are advanced technologically, the participants might not want to have there, and I assume the Americans are thought to be among the best qualified.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: It is American equipment, as I understand it, and it would probably take training of other nations to do the job and I think there is a time element involved.

As Senator Scott said, it is our understanding that the fact that this is an all American force is not at our insistence but more at the insistence of the other two parties.

Q Senator Scott, you don't object to the civilian force carrying side arms? And are you satisfied about the security precautions that will be taken to protect the Americans there?

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SENATOR SCOTT: I would prefer that the security precautions rest upon the assurances adequate to this country. I would not want any of our civilian volunteers to be treated in any sense as combat personnel or armed personnel. After all, they will be in the UN zones, or close enough to them that any armed personnel is taken care of by the UN.

Q Does -- on oil control -- does the Administration or Republican leadership have a new formula that would avoid sudden decontrol of prices or are you depending entirely on the Congress accepting the 39-month plan which the House has already rejected, or had rejected?

SENATOR SCOTT: After all, this proposal comes from the Democratic majority, it is acceptable to the President and, therefore, it is the one which we ought to pursue. I don't know what we gain by discussing a lot of alternatives when you have the Congressional party leaders in both parties and the President pointing toward a single compromise solution if they can get it.

Now on natural gas, as you probably know, the President was favorably impressed by the action of all the Governors but one, one unfortunate exception, unfortunate in many ways, who did not agree with the proposed five-year phase-out of decontrol of natural gas.

Q Senator, it is your understanding then that what Senator Mansfield wants to do is just revive the President's last plan, the 39-month plan?

SENATOR SCOTT: Well, I think this becomes not only the President's plan but a plan which the majority leader of the Senate and the Speaker both indicate they will do their best to get through. While the President has been saying something like this for a long time and working up from 30 months to 39 months, the fact that the Congress is amenable, or the Congressional leaders are amenable, I think makes its chances of passage somewhat better.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: Actually, I think you would agree with me, Senator, that the initiative of the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House constitutes real active statesmanship and recognition of the fact we do need to go ahead and get this problem solved for the benefit of the country.

Q Congressman Rhodes, you reported in your trip back home -- and I also want to ask Senator Scott about the feeling in Pennsylvania -- that people were tired of the procrastination on the part of Congress. How does that balance out with their attitude toward the recent rises in gasoline prices and the expectation of a further sudden increase?

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CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I gather that most of the people who have really analyzed the situation are more worried about shortages and the fact that we continue to operate at a deficit in the balance of payments than they are about immediate rises in gasoline. Whenever I had a chance to actually discuss this with anybody at all of any walk of life, they would agree with me that we have a long-term problem which requires a long-term solution.

Q. Mr. Rhodes, is the House going to repeal the Turkish embargo?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: It is my understanding they will. I haven't had a chance to discuss the program with the Speaker. It is not now programmed but it could be programmed for later this week, but my hunch is it would probably come up next week.

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Q Senator Scott, or Mr. Rhodes, could you please both answer Senator Jackson's accusations yesterday that the civilian advisers would potentially lead to more Russian involvement, particularly in the Golan?

SENATOR SCOTT: I don't believe it is very profitable to indulge in early and preliminary debates with candidates for the Presidency. I don't think I want to dignify that except as a political statement.

Q How about the statement by Senator Mansfield?

SENATOR SCOTT: Senator Mansfield is not a candidate for President, so I would be glad to say that I hope that as he considers it more at length and discussed it with his conference, that he may come to see the fact that there is no better alternative to the proposal suggested.

I do make a distinction between candidates and responsible spokesmen.

Q Could Congressman Rhodes answer my question?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: I just don't think Senator Jackson's track record as far as his analysis of Russian actions is all that good. I don't think I would put much credibility in his statement.

Q Do you both feel this plan for civilian advisers will pass both Houses of Congress?

SENATOR SCOTT: I said I thought as far as the Senate was concerned, in view of the earlier announcements of support from various quarters, it is likely to pass. People will come in with amendments, but I hope they will not be crippling ones.

Q Will you try to find out everything in the agreement before you make a decision?

SENATOR SCOTT: That is the purpose of the hearings and the briefings. Dr. Kissinger will brief the bipartisan leadership tomorrow and he will be asked every question people can think of.

Q There have been secret understandings on Vietnam that were never --

SENATOR SCOTT: I can't guarantee who has secret understandings on what, including you, ladies and gentlemen. You had one with somebody before you announced your marriage. (Laughter)

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Q Senator, you brought up politics. How do you see the issues shaping up after this visit back home? What is it -- economy, peace, what?

SENATOR SCOTT: I think the economy is an important issue. I found generally disgust with Congress wherever I went, a general sort of an undifferentiated disgust of why doesn't Congress get off the dime, why don't you tell those people to work something out for us so we can have some settlement on all this energy stuff, as they put it.

I found a very strong desire that the President and the Congress get together on it.

As to foreign policy, I didn't find any great criticism, any terribly lively interest. Discussions of foreign policy usually come at points of crisis, and at that time that I was available, there were no immediate, high, penetrating crises.

Q Congressman Rhodes, you said that rather than being concerned about price, the people in your district are more concerned about shortages and balance of payments. Is balance of payments what people talk to you about in Arizona?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: They do when I bring it up. (Laughter)

Q When you say shortages, do you mean gasoline lines at the pumps?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: That is what I mean exactly.

Q Doesn't that defeat the entire purpose of this conservation business? Isn't it the President's view that the price should go up so we control use?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: Yes, but of course we want to do it in an orderly sort of way instead of the disorderly way which we had before because we had no mechanism at the time when the embargo was put on.

Q What did people tell you in Pennsylvania about gasoline prices, Senator Scott?

SENATOR SCOTT: Nobody ever likes taxes or an increase in prices. Nobody ever likes anything which adds to their daily combat with the problems of their own family. I think that they are more aggravated at the Congress than they are at anyone else.

I have never seen a time when people praised high taxes or when people cheered at any increases in the cost of living. I think that there is a general relief that we are out of the depression, a general hope that inflation can be contained and a strong desire that the Congress and the President work constructively together in the interest of the people and the general feeling Congress has let the people down.

I do think, too, some people are greatly worried about the reported shortage of natural gas as it will affect Pennsylvania and New Jersey very seriously this fall. I want to again repeat unless this Congress does something that natural gas shortage is going to be in part the fault of Congress.

Q Gentlemen, did you find on your last few days at home any response at all to what was happening in the Middle East? We did know about the American technicians even though the agreement had not been initialed.

SENATOR SCOTT: I found a more or less unformed reaction, what does it mean, we don't want to be involved in any wars out there, that sort of attitude. I also found relief that there seemed to be some agreement coming, a feeling that the shuttle diplomacy might work this time. But, there was not really a formed public opinion because it happened so recently.

Q Do you think the President and Secretary Kissinger are really going to have to sell this plan, that people really just haven't made up their minds yet, and they have a lot of questions about it and they are deeply concerned that we might be getting involved in another Vietnam?

SENATOR SCOTT: I don't believe it will be that serious as long as it is fairly and factually reported, as you ladies and gentlemen will do.

Q Senator, did anybody tell you gentlemen where the volunteers will come from? Will they be CIA retreads?

SENATOR SCOTT: Nobody has told us. Generally, they come from technical expertise type people.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: They will come from contractors; in other words, there will be a series of at least one contract, maybe several others, let to provide this service and the contractor will hire the people. They will not be military people.

Q What kind of contractors are these?

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: We don't know. I would assume it is people who are --

SENATOR SCOTT: Free enterprise.

CONGRESSMAN RHODES: -- technically qualified to operate that equipment.

THE PRESS: Thank you, gentlemen.

END (AT 10:37 A.M. EDT)