

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

WILLIAM V. ROTH, JR.

SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF DELAWARE

AND

LOWELL P. WEICKER, JR.

SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

8:56 A.M. EDT

MR. GREENER: I would just like to mention that the President met with the Republican Senators from 7:30 until about 8:45. Those that were attending were Senators Weicker, Brock, Taft, Curtis, Schweiker, Thurmond, Case, Dole and Roth.

The President, the Vice President, Don Rumsfeld, Alan Greenspan, Jack Marsh and Frank Zarb were also present.

In just a second Senator Roth and Senator Weicker will give you some briefing on the breakfast this morning.

SENATOR ROTH: As has been indicated, we met for nearly an hour and a half with the President. I think real progress is being made.

I introduced last week a proposal to extend control for 45 days. I am optimistic that we are going to be able to get that through. It seems to me with the assurance of the President that he is actively supporting this proposal that we will be able to sustain the President's veto six months which, in my judgment, is too long.

We are on the horns of a dilemma. It seems to me that in my travels around the State of Delaware at least it is absolutely essential that as far as the people are concerned that we get a national energy program. I think by getting this 45-day extension through it will mean that we will be able to reach an agreement.

Both the majority leader, Mr. Mansfield, and the Speaker, as well as the press, have indicated interest in the President's compromise, and I am hopeful that will be the basis on which we will be able to operate in the next 30 days.

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Q Senator, are you saying you think they can sustain the veto?

SENATOR ROTH: Yes. I think we have got the votes to sustain the veto.

Q Have you done a head count?

SENATOR ROTH: I would guess that we got roughly around 34.

There was a general consensus this morning to go along with the proposition of extending -- in fact, everybody there agreed to co-sponsor this 45-day extension.

Lowell.

SENATOR WEICKER: I just think the feeling on the part of many of us is that however one likes to go ahead and point a finger at the Arabs as being the cause of our unemployment and high energy prices, an equal cause is the inability of the Congress to make decisions. So I would hope, and I think that many felt the same way in that room, that come Wednesday we are going to make a decision, because I think it goes not just to the matter of gasoline prices but very much to the economy and to the employment statistics in this country which at least as far as my State is concerned are far too high.

SENATOR ROTH: Absolutely. The public wants something done. I think that is the message we are getting back home.

Q What do you think will be done?

Q Say you get your 45 days.

SENATOR WEICKER: I would expect the veto to be sustained, and at that time the Congress is going to go ahead and have to talk turkey instead of playing politics.

Now that is what has been going on and, believe me, all we have got to show for it over two years is higher prices and greater unemployment. So I would expect that Wednesday is going to be a turning point, that then we go ahead and lay the ground work for an agreement as between all sides--Executive and Legislative Branch.

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SENATOR ROTH: I was just going to say I think a national consensus is developing. The President has gone a long way in trying to reach a compromise when you have the majority leader and the Speaker of the House both agreeing that he has been reasonable, that he has been flexible and that he is still flexible, in my judgment.

When you got the fact that all your press, practically, whether it is so-called conservative, liberal, from the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor and the Washington Post -- I think we are in a position where the country is in about agreement as to what that program should be.

Q What is it that ---

SENATOR ROTH: Well, I think, of course, the President's proposed 39 months -- I think Mike Mansfield has suggested something like four to six years. I think there is room for compromise in there.

The President has capped it at \$11.50. We have agreed to put an excess profits tax on the Senate side. We have got one coming out of the Finance Committee, with the plowback. So I think the basic form is pretty much set. We are within the field and there is room to compromise further to get ---

Q Will the President go beyond 39 months?

SENATOR ROTH: Well, I am not in a position to speak for the President, but I think he is flexible on that.

SENATOR WEICKER: I think even there I would point out that even as among that group there was disagreement as to allowing it to go out 39 months, and I don't mean from the Democratic side. I, myself, feel that we ought to do it right away and be done with it. So I am not a 39-month man, if you will.

Q You want it right away?

SENATOR WEICKER: I mean decontrol, in other words, not phase it out over 39 months.

Q They are decontrolling but -- they are off now, aren't they?

SENATOR WEICKER: Well, I understand but I am talking about as far as the future is concerned whatever compromises are arrived at. I am not for going ahead and dragging this matter out. I am for decontrol, yes, you have it now.

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Q I thought all of you went home and found the people were unhappy with rising prices because of the control situation.

SENATOR WEICKER: There is no question about it but what they are saying is that these rising prices are due as much to the failure of Congress to act as any other reason and we feel that we want some action to take place.

I point out to them -- I think so does Senator Roth -- we have had two years of control and two years of no action, and in the meantime the prices have soared as has the unemployment, so I think it is time we tried something else.

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Q If the controls are off?

SENATOR WEICKER: I think in the long run the longer you keep on controls the more unemployment and the higher the prices are going to be.

Q But we got a reading about a week ago from the leadership, including the Senate Majority Leader and the House Speaker, that all this was going to happen and then within 24 hours back up on the Hill the reading is exactly the same.

SENATOR WEICKER: Because I think they were speaking reality, they were making their statements in good faith. I think they got back into their own caucuses and you started the political game all over again. That is what happened. That is what we don't want.

SENATOR ROTH: Let me point this out, too.

SENATOR WEICKER: We have gotten religion.

SENATOR ROTH: We also had seven members of the Democratic side meet in the White House last Saturday, all of which had said that they were supportive of the 45 day extension, so I don't think there is the unanimity that was pointed out the other day. I think that there are a lot of Democrats as well as Republicans want a national energy policy now, they are getting the same message we want, and I think they are going to be able to work in a reasonable fashion.

Q Don't you really have reason to believe that you didn't have a week ago that the Democratic leadership can deliver?

SENATOR ROTH: Well, I think as a result of some of the things that have happened -- the meeting Saturday, the fact that we met this morning and everybody there was unanimous on this 45 day extension -- yes, I think we are in a position for action to be taken.

SENATOR WEICKER: Let me respond this way. I think there are enough Republicans and Democrats who are not going to play politics that the veto is going to be sustained. Now both Senator Roth and myself are up for re-election and the easy and the political way is for us to go ahead and override this veto. Not so, and I think there are enough men on both sides of the issue or rather both parties that are going to say the hell with the politics and let's get on with the energy policy, that that veto is going to be sustained on Wednesday.

Q Did you discuss anything else?

SENATOR ROTH: No, that was all. Thank you.

MR. GREENER: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

END (AT 9:05 A.M. EDT)