

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 11, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
TED STEVENS
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ALASKA
AND
GUY VANDER JAGT
REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

THE BRIEFING ROOM

12:14 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: While everybody is getting ready, I will explain what it is we have here.

As you know, the President has just met for about 40 minutes with Republican Congressional leaders seeking their view on whether to sign or veto the Federal Election Commission legislation. This is part of a continuing series of discussions he has had to obtain the views of various political leaders.

To give you some idea of how the meeting went, we have Senator Stevens of Alaska, who is the Chairman of the Senatorial Campaign Committee, and Congressman Vander Jagt of Michigan, who is the Chairman of the Congressional Campaign Committee.

Q Ron, what is the latest status of the President making a decision today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really have any good feel for that yet, John.

I think Senator Stevens and Congressman Vander Jagt have a view on that.

SENATOR STEVENS: We have met with the President at our request. We asked him to delay his decision until we could review it and the procedure that will be followed after the bill is signed.

We believe the President will sign the bill today and we have recommended that he send up the six nominees at the same time.

Guy Vander Jagt would have some comments, too, I am sure, but the overwhelming sentiment of the Republican leadership was to sign the bill. We don't think it is a perfect bill; we think we can improve on it next year. But, in view of the circumstances that exist right now, we believe the bill ought to be signed.

MORE

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: I think Ted Stevens has summarized it well for you. There were 12 individuals there from the Republican leadership of the Congress. Nine urged the President to go ahead and sign the bill. Three took no position. So there was really no strong urging that he veto the legislation, not on the grounds that many of us are very happy about the bill but that it is probably the best bill that can be achieved from this Congress.

Q When you say you believe he will sign it, is that based on something he told you or your hope?

SENATOR STEVENS: We both spoke to him personally when the matter was through and he told us that we could expect him to make his decision today and sign the bill today.

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: In his conversation with me, it was that he will probably make a final decision today. I personally received no indication that he would either sign it or veto it, but, judging by the virtually unanimous urging from the Republican leadership that he sign, it would be my personal guess, but no more than that, that he will sign the bill.

Q Gentlemen, as you know, some of Mr. Ford's political advisers are concerned about the fact that the President could be accused of unfairly dealing with his opponent, Mr. Reagan, if he either delayed the signing of the bill or vetoed the bill. Did you bring that up this morning?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: It was brought up and I think that all were concerned that any appearance even of personal private advantage be avoided, and that was urged upon him as one of the reasons to go ahead and sign the bill.

Q Did he have any response to that?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: He did not.

Q Do you expect Curtis to remain on, or his name to be resubmitted?

SENATOR STEVENS: The President will have to decide that; he has the resignation of Mr. Curtis. We have urged that the names be submitted to the Senate as quickly as possible and we want to get them all confirmed as quickly as possible.

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: I think the decision will be Mr. Curtis'.

MORE

SENATOR STEVENS: I want to point out, though, that the delay the President had has been insignificant compared even to the time it has taken to write the Conference Report. I don't believe the President has delayed it. As I stated previously, this delay that has taken place over the weekend was specifically at our request so we could discuss the procedures to be followed once the decision is made.

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: I wrote the President on Friday saying, "Please, please, before you make a final decision will you let Ted and myself and at least Mary Louise Smith meet with you before a final decision is taken?"

I just stepped off a plane and this is the first opportunity that we could have to have such a meeting.

Q Why did you do that, Congressman? What was so urgent about that?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: Well, from what I was reading in the press, I thought there was some inaccurate information and analysis that I didn't know if it was getting through to him in that form or not.

Q You were afraid he was going to veto it, is that it?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: I was afraid he was not getting a picture that I felt was essential from one who had lived with this bill almost every day for the last three or four months.

Q Are you referring to the PAC provisions in the bill?

SENATOR STEVENS: Yes.

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: I think I would be, and I certainly wanted to make a point about the PAC provisions, yes.

Q Would you explain what that is, for people who don't know what the PAC provisions are?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: The PAC provisions are political action committees authorized to be established under this and other laws to which either labor, business or industry can contribute in order to impact on elections, and not just Presidential elections -- in fact, primarily on Congressional elections, and that is why I have, of course, had an interest.

Q Congressman, you are from Michigan. Have you noticed any fall-out in Michigan yet, people sympathizing with Reagan because of the delay in signing the bill?

MORE

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: Oh, absolutely none. Reagan is urging a veto of the bill so I don't think that argument holds water at all.

Q You didn't talk any politics in there today, or how it looks in Michigan, or how the President expects to do in Alaska?

CONGRESSMAN VANDER JAGT: We did not. We were right on the Federal Election Commission bill.

Q You said you were going to review it next year, Senator. In what way do you understand the bill goes in perpetuity?

SENATOR STEVENS: Well, the bill has some constraints on the Commission's independence that we think ought to be reviewed, and I personally think the overall concept of the Commission and the limitations ought to be further reviewed in view of the Supreme Court's opinion about contributions and the amount an individual can spend on his own race. There are some inequities that are starting to show around the country, I think, in terms of that, and we will want to take a nice, long look at that bill in a non-election year, I think, to make it more responsive to the needs of political campaigns.

As far as the facts are concerned, for instance, I have advised the President that I don't think the PAC provision is as important this year as it might be in subsequent years. These political action committees have to be in being for six months; they have to have received contributions for 50 individuals and contributed to five campaigns.

That limits that provision this year and it is important in this year's campaign, and I think by the time we come back in next year we can take a look at that and see what we can do to make the PAC provision more responsive to the total requests of those who are managing the PACs, so they can have a greater impact on the 1978 campaign.

Many of them have not been in being long enough to contribute to primaries and, if they do get involved in the general elections this year, I don't think they will have too much money to deal with this year's campaign anyway.

Q Governor Reagan's point, isn't he arguing that since the labor union PACs have been in existence this is an unfair advantage for labor unions and, therefore, it should be vetoed? Do you expect the President to lose some support if he signs it?

MORE

SENATOR STEVENS: I would hope he wouldn't. We have examined the PACs and the use of funds from the political action committees in the past and they have primarily been oriented towards incumbents. They have not really gotten involved in primary races where I personally believe the greatest impact can be made on a candidate selection procedure rather than in a general election, and the primaries will practically be over by the time this bill becomes effective anyway.

So we still have the delay, you understand, of confirmation, and that was one of the reasons we wanted to meet with the President -- to make sure the procedures would be that he understood that we requested at least that all six members be sent up at the same time and that we urged the leadership to act on those as soon as possible, but I don't think the PAC provision is that important this year.

I do believe that there are some substantial objections that are valid to the provisions of this bill that we ought to review in the next Congress.

Q Does the President have the six nominees ready to go?

SENATOR STEVENS: He will make his decision on that this afternoon. We were not authorized to make any comment about that.

Q Did he indicate he had six names in mind?

SENATOR STEVENS: Yes, he did.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much.

END (AT 12:26 P.M. EDT)