

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#406

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:38 P.M. EST

JANUARY 2, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: Some of you who were around yesterday know that the President -- we put this on the telephone recording machine -- signed an additional 14 bills and vetoed one bill. This leaves six more bills to go. He has to do that by midnight tonight. One of those includes the common situs picketing bill, which he has already said he will veto. We will get that information to you later today as he does it.

As for yesterday, the President worked in his office most of the day, a good deal of the day. He had a meeting dealing with the budget and State of the Union. It began at 11:40 yesterday morning and lasted until 2:35 in the afternoon.

Those attending included Jim Cannon, Jim Lynn, Paul O'Neill, Bill Seidman and Dick Cheney. After that meeting concluded, Dick Cheney stayed for another 55 minutes and worked with the President on paperwork and other matters.

Then the President worked alone in his office for another 2 hours and 15 minutes, until 5:45. After that, he took a short swim and went up to the Residence.

The President put in phone calls to most of the departmental Secretaries to wish them a Happy New Year and best wishes for 1976.

Then, last evening, the President invited some friends over to watch the Orange Bowl game, beginning at 7:30. They were Mr. and Mrs. John Byrnes, the former Congressman from Wisconsin, Senator and Mrs. Bob Griffin, Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Laird, Mr. and Mrs. Clark MacGregor and Mr. and Mrs. William Whyte.

Q Did they cry?

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MR. NESSEN: The President's comments on the football game are that he thinks Oklahoma played a fine football game.

Q But they cheated? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Michigan did very well, but they were playing a very tough team.

The next item is that the sign-up list has been posted for the St. Louis trip. That is on Monday. All those interested in going to St. Louis should sign themselves up by six o'clock tonight. That is the closing time.

Later today, we will put out a summary schedule of the St. Louis trip. The bible we hope to have tomorrow, along with an advance text of the President's speech.

Q Tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow is Saturday, isn't it? Yes.

My thought would be to make the speech available for p.m. papers on Monday. It will be basically a farm speech, although he will discuss a couple of other areas.

Q You say Saturday. Do you have any idea what time Saturday you hope to have that out?

MR. NESSEN: The President worked on the speech this morning, up until about noon, for about an hour, and he plans to work on it again, beginning at about 6:30 or 6:45 this evening. So, he is well along on it.

I would suggest, Jim, that you call in maybe around noon and see where we stand on it tomorrow.

The check-in time at Andrews on Monday is 7:45. The departure time of the press plane is 8:15 on Monday.

Just to give you a rundown on what he is going to do out there, the first event is the speech itself, which is to the Convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Q What time is that, please, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I believe it is about 11:15 local time out there. Then he will have a reception and lunch with -- I think it is called -- the Executive Committee or the Directors of the American Farm Bureau Federation, about 20 people.

Secretary Butz will be there. The President will take a number of Members, who either come from farm States or who serve on the Senate or House Agricultural Committees, with him. They will also attend the lunch.

Q Is that a bipartisan group?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is.

After the lunch, the President will meet for a half hour or 45 minutes with some newspaper editors and publishers from Missouri, as well as a couple of the surrounding States, and then will come home.

Q Is that on the record, that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: It is like the others he has had as he has traveled around the country.

Q That means no coverage?

MR. NESSEN: No, there isn't.

Q Can we have pool coverage?

Q How about having it piped?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is the same as the others, Helen.

Q On the others we have gotten a fill from either you or a member of your staff --

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I could do that.

Q We don't want to be denied the news, and that is what will happen if we are not allowed to have coverage of this.

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MR. NESSEN: Jim Falk, the Associate Director of the Domestic Council, has decided to go into private industry. We have available in the Press Office an exchange of letters between Jim and the President.

Q To go back to this meeting with editors and publishers of newspapers --

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q There would be no TV or radio in that, is that right? I am talking of coverage and the composition of the group itself. Is it only newspapers or TV and radio?

MR. NESSEN: All newspapers.

Q No coverage of any sort, including radio and electronic?

MR. NESSEN: That's right.

Q You are putting 25 newspaper editors in with the President, presumably some know how to write. Now, these people are going to go back and write stories or columns or editorials or their impressions of the meeting with the President. In view of that, how can you justify excluding the traveling White House?

MR. NESSEN: The President has taken the opportunity, as he has gone around the country, to meet different groups in different settings and has done the same here in Washington. This is just another opportunity to meet people in the press. It is not the exclusive way he meets people in the press, it is just one way. He has done it all over the country and this is another one of those occasions.

Q It is absolutely fair that you put out a transcript on this. He is going to make statements that affect the public interest and national interest and it is just plain not fair to have exclusive press conferences, and that goes for the other day, too.

MR. NESSEN: There is one addition to the President's schedule. At 5 o'clock, he will meet with Secretary --

Q He has no answer.

MR. NESSEN: Helen, look, he has had 50-some interviews since he became President.

Q I know, but you made available the transcripts on those.

MR. NESSEN: This is an opportunity to exchange views and the format on the out-of-town editorial meetings, regional editor and publisher meetings, has been that it is just as much of a chance for him to hear their views as it is for them to hear his views. He has felt all along, since this is only one of a number of formats, that the exchange of views he thinks is better without press coverage.

Q I don't see why. He is going to have press coverage.

MR. NESSEN: If this were the only way that he were meeting the members of the press, I would agree totally with you, but he has big open news conferences, he has smaller conversations, he has one-on-one interviews, such as the one with you. He has local talk shows, local TV interviews, local newspaper interviews.

Q The one with me was made public right afterwards. I am saying he may make announcements of public interest and we should know about it.

MR. NESSEN: You will.

Q Will the guests on this occasion be told it is off-the-record?

MR. NESSEN: It is not off the record, John.

Q Then would they be allowed to release a transcript?

MR. NESSEN: There will be no transcript made.

Q Can they tape and then transcribe?

MR. NESSEN: There won't be any electronic equipment in there.

Q I mean the conversation on this occasion, is that off the record? Obviously the event is on the record.

MR. NESSEN: You mean what the President says, they may use what the President says as background material for editorials and columns and so forth.

The addition to the President's schedule is that at 5 o'clock he is meeting with Secretary Coleman, Deputy Attorney General Tyler --

Q His first name, please?

MR. NESSEN: Harold -- and FAA Administrator, John McLucas, for the updated report he requested on the LaGuardia Airport explosion.

Q Will that be released in any way, a fill or any information?

MR. NESSEN: No, because at this point it is only an interim report. The New York City authorities are those responsible for handling the actual reports on the investigation.

Q Will you give us a fill on this at all?

MR. NESSEN: I did the other night and I will sit in on the meeting and see if there is anything I can relay to you.

Q Any pictures on this occasion?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably not, Bob.

Q Does the President agree with the widespread closing of lockers throughout the Nation in airports?

MR. NESSEN: He was told at the first meeting that there would be steps taken at the 500 airports where the FAA is involved. My understanding is that the two specific closings that have been mentioned, one at New York City airports and the other at the Washington airports, were done by the local people who control those airports.

As I said the other night, Secretary Coleman and Administrator McLucas are preparing a set of recommendations for reinforcing airport and airplane security and those have not come to the President yet.

Q Has the President been told whether any authorities have any notion of who did this?

MR. NESSEN: He has been told that who did it and why is not known at the moment.

I don't have any other announcements to make, I don't think.

Q Are we going to have any access to Mathews after his meeting?

Q Question, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Adam was wondering whether there would be an opportunity to talk to Secretary Mathews after his meeting with the President.

I didn't anticipate there would be any. The President has --

Q Give Adam an exclusive on that.

MR. NESSEN: The President meets from time to time with Cabinet people and this particular meeting is to discuss, in very general terms, the objectives of his Department.

Q Are they going to talk about that health consolidation?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the meeting is described as a general discussion of objectives of the Department and that is not one of the specific matters mentioned in the briefing paper.

Q Ron, is Scranton joining the White House staff?

MR. NESSEN: The question was, I think, in reference to the Evans and Novak column today on Governor Scranton joining the White House staff. There has been no decision made as to any individual joining the White House staff. I think the President discussed in general terms the possibility of somebody coming aboard, but it hasn't gone beyond what he said.

Q Would Scranton be a leading candidate for the job he talked about on Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any decision on any particular individual.

Q During the meeting with -- this says selective reporters -- the President said he would strengthen the country's moral and spiritual values by participating with spiritual leaders throughout the country on a nondenominational basis. My question is which leaders other than Billy Zeoli when will he meet, and will he attend this meeting of Presidential candidates with church leaders at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on January 19?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce on that.

Q He has nothing in mind, to your knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce today, Les.

Q There is a difference -- he is planning, but there is nothing to announce?

MR. NESSEN: I have nothing to announce today.

Q He isn't going to start worship services at the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q When the President talked about the Scranton thing, you said he discussed some sort of addition to the staff, but you left it unclear as to who --

MR. NESSEN: When did I say he discussed an addition to the White House staff?

Q I forget your exact words, but you said --

MR. NESSEN: I said I didn't have any decision to announce today as to any individual taking such a job.

Q You said he had talked to --

MR. NESSEN: No, I said the President talked about that subject recently and I didn't have anything to add to what he had said.

Q With whom did he talk?

MR. NESSEN: To a group of reporters.

Q Has he talked to Scranton?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce on that particular job today, Helen.

Q Bob Norton?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce on it.

Q Do you have anything to say on changes in your own staff here in the Press Room?

MR. NESSEN: We announced John Carlson as the Deputy Press Secretary.

Q How about Jack Hushen and Judy O'Neill?

MR. NESSEN: Jack Hushen is here and working, as far as I know.

Q Is he leaving?

MR. NESSEN: You should talk to Jack about his own plans.

Q Is Judy O'Neill discharged, and, if so, for what reason?

MR. NESSEN: Judy O'Neill has taken some leave time and will be, as I understand it, talking to the Personnel Office about another job.

Q Is she going to get another job in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: She is going to discuss it with the personnel people.

Q Did you fire her, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: John, frankly, I don't think that the administration of the Press Office down to the level of secretaries is a matter that needs to be discussed publicly.

Q Well, he thinks so. I mean, in other words, is this just a refusal? A lot of people are interested. He is interested, I am interested and I think there are others. Did you fire her or not, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

Q Ron, can you tell us anything about the possibility of the CIA training people for operations in Angola, and whether there are in fact people in training by the CIA, and whether there are some already in Angola?

MR. NESSEN: No agency of the U.S. Government is using American mercenaries in Angola, nor is any U.S. Government agency recruiting, hiring, or training American mercenaries.

Q What about non-American mercenaries?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to add to that, to what I just said.

Q Read that second sentence there again, will you?

MR. NESSEN: Nor is any U.S. Government agency recruiting, hiring or training American mercenaries.

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Q Would it be possible that the U.S. Government has hired another organization or is paying another organization or has set up a front of some kind so another organization is actually doing it but the U.S. Government is paying for it?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean another country?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean like a private contractor?

Q The CIA sets up phony airlines and all kinds of phony corporations to carry out its activities. I am asking, are they doing that in this case?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, no private company or contractor is hiring American mercenaries for combat duty.

Q What about a foreign country?

Q You are saying combat duty. How about for any other advisory or technical roles?

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I know. The reason I say combat duty, was not to differentiate between advising, or whatever, and combat duty. What I mean there was that -- you know there are private companies in Angola. Now, whether they need a guard to stand guard at the gate or something like that, I don't know anything about that. But, as far as I know, no private company is hiring American mercenaries.

Q What about the foreign country question?

MR. NESSEN: On the foreign country question, Peter, as you probably know, it is no secret the American Government is giving modest amounts of assistance to some African countries. But, I think it is fair to say that no U.S. Government agency has any way of knowing precisely how every last penny is spent of that assistance.

Q Let me ask the question more directly. Is any foreign country having mercenaries trained or recruited in this country using American military facilities for that purpose?

MR. NESSEN: Is any foreign country having American mercenaries --

Q -- any mercenaries trained in this country, using American military facilities like Fort Benning, Georgia, for example?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I don't have anything to add beyond what I have said.

Q Ron, there is a story that some Cubans who are not Americans -- that is, Cubans living in this country -- are being recruited and trained for service in Angola. Are you denying that?

MR. NESSEN: I think I won't add anything to what I have said, Bob.

Q Ron, when you were on vacation, I asked Bill Greener about what information the Government had on technical representatives of U.S. companies in Angola, how many and what functions. He said he would get that information and didn't before he left. Do you have that information?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't even pass on the query to me, so I didn't know about the query until just now.

Q May I renew the query with you?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, you have answered every question except what about non-Americans, which to me is a rather significant comment. You say, "I don't want to add anything to what I have said." Do you agree that can be interpreted in the way I am now thinking about, and others?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to tell you how to interpret anything.

Q You have answered every question with a firm comment except that particular comment.

MR. NESSEN: I won't add anything to what I have said.

Q Ron, you obviously have been reading from something as you answer these questions. Is this a case where you are --

MR. NESSEN: Some scrawly notes.

Q Are you operating strictly under instructions not to go beyond the statement, or is this a case where your own knowledge doesn't go beyond the statement?

MR. NESSEN: I anticipated there would be questions about the article in the Christian Science Monitor, and I did some research this morning, and these are the answers I came up with.

Q So, you have personal knowledge, not just a position paper that someone has given to you.

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Does that indicate then that your refusal to comment on non-Americans indicates you have some personal knowledge in that area that you cannot give us?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think I want to comment on what I have said.

Q What is the question you are refusing to answer? Are you saying you are not going to say whether a U.S. agency is hiring non-Americans or training non-Americans as mercenaries? Is that what you are not going to answer?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the questions I am not going to answer.

Q As I understand it, Ron, you are saying that we are giving what you describe as modest amounts of money to certain foreign countries and we don't know how that money is being spent?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know precisely how every last cent of it is being spent.

Q Ron, what is modest amounts of money?

MR. NESSEN: You can get that from the State Department on a country-by-country breakdown. I don't have it, Dick.

Q Ron, can we get from the ridiculous back to the sublime and talk about this New York Avenue Presbyterian Church affair?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard of that until Les mentioned it to me.

Q I don't know whether you are aware or not, but the sponsor of this affair said he received five acceptances from Presidential candidates and only two rejections, one from George Wallace and the other from President Ford.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know anything about it until just now. What is the question?

Q I want to know if this is true, whether the President had rejected it or not.

MR. NESSEN: I will check with the Scheduling Office and find out.

Q Could we go back to the President's meeting with reporters on Wednesday? At the end of that session, with reporters, the President had some things to say about the fact that now all reporters were invited, and he said something to the effect that he hoped no one was angry about this and pointed out, as you have, that there would be other such functions and other people would be invited.

He made it very clear from his own words that he had some apprehensions about the reaction of people who were not invited to that particular session. I have two questions about it.

Can you amplify on this? How did he know that people were upset and how deeply is he concerned about it. Secondly, did he blame you for this?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think he felt it was a situation that required blame. As you know, he came down to the briefing room a couple of Saturdays ago and found a relatively small group here and felt that the format was another one that he could add to the list of formats he uses and enjoyed the size and sort of intimacy of the group and thought he would like to try it again, which he did, and will again.

So, rather than blame, he is really quite pleased with the way those smaller conversations have worked out. As for how he knew about it, I guess one way is he could probably hear you from my office to his. But, I told him, when we talked about it, that obviously -- as is the case with people who have requests in for personal interviews with the President, which number I guess a couple of hundred by now -- you make a few people happy and you make all the rest unhappy, so he knew that would be the case.

Q Will there be equal time on television as the political year --

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to do with television or equal time.

Q Ron, could I put in a good word for what happened Wednesday when you had originally announced to these 22 people who were going to be there, and then there was going to be a transcript some four hours later, and when I brought up the subject there was a very quick and constructive attitude on the part of your staff, and then you agreed to pipe it in.

This is what I think they are talking about for the St. Louis thing. You could still have your small group there and chat and it wouldn't be inhibited, but if you piped it in to the other reporters, they could still write their stories about it.

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a little different than the one the other day. Let me say also about the other day, I have been around Washington for a fair number of years and have read things written on the institution of the Presidential press conference, and there is always a question raised as to whether there isn't a better way to do it or whether there aren't ways to have different kinds of news conferences, as well as the big televised ones, and it is an effort to meet those kinds of thoughts that serious reporters have had over the years.

As I say, the President is quite pleased with the way they work. You know, I want to assure you that there will continue to be the big, "everybody comes," news conference. There will continue to be individual interviews. There will be these. There will be the out-of-town things.

Q We have to register a protest, though, against exclusivity by people covering the White House who should be denied the news. You are implying the news editors and publishers in St. Louis will not ask hard news questions, which isn't true.

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't expect them not to ask hard news questions, Helen.

Q Then we will be denied the news.

MR. NESSEN: I am saying the ones I have attended, I guess all of them, I guess maybe one of these sort of exchanges between regional editors and publishers, they always turn out to be more of them telling the President their views and the views of their area and readers than it does the President telling them his views, and the President has found that by having it private, that feedback process works better.

Q Ron, is the President considering any kind of action in connection with the announced plans of a magazine to publish more names of CIA agents?

MR. NESSEN: No, in terms of action. Certainly he would reiterate the views he expressed publicly about his feeling that that kind of thing puts agents in danger.

Q Ron, may I ask what the Presidential reaction is to Indira Gandhi's series of blasts? Was he surprised at what she has been saying?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any reaction because I didn't talk to him about it.

Q Ron, the President mentioned his willingness to put out his financial statements and medical records. When is he going to do that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any specific timetable for when he is going to do it.

Q What are his weekend plans?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he will be here. What is today, Friday? He will be doing some work tomorrow and staying in town for the weekend.

Q Will you have a briefing tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think so. I will be here all day, but won't have a briefing.

Q Ron, when you hear he is coming down to hold a press conference, could you do a slightly more extensive call-out than last time?

MR. NESSEN: He is not planning to have a news conference tomorrow or Sunday.

Q Why is the President delaying signing the common situs bill? It is strange. Since he has announced his intention, why doesn't he just do it?

MR. NESSEN: If I am not mistaken, part of the problem was that it didn't get down here for quite a while. It is here now, and today is the deadline, and today is the deadline and he will do what he said he will.

Q Is that the only reason, it hadn't arrived?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:07 P.M. EST)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH JOHN CARLSON

AT 6:15 P.M. EST

JANUARY 2, 1976

FRIDAY

MR. CARLSON: Mike Duval is here, who was in the meeting. The meeting began at 5:10 and lasted until 5:50.

Meeting with the President were Secretary Coleman, Administrator McLucas, Deputy Attorney General Tyler, Mr. Phil Buchen, Jim Cannon and Mike Duval.

The meeting began with a report by Deputy Attorney General Harold Tyler. I think you all know Attorney General Levi is out of town. Deputy Attorney General Tyler gave a status update on the criminal investigation. Deputy Attorney General Tyler said there were no new leads, but they are pursuing the leads they have. They also mentioned, or reiterated, that the New York authorities are being assisted by over 300 Federal officers -- or officials.

Then the President asked Secretary Coleman and Administrator McLucas to give him a rundown on the status of the Federal review of airport and aircraft security.

Secretary Coleman made the point that airport security across the country is tighter now --

Q Airport or aircraft?

MR. CARLSON: -- airport security is tighter now since the tragic incident at LaGuardia.

So, really, the sum total of the meeting is that the President directed the Deputy Attorney General to keep him informed as the investigation progresses and directed Secretary Coleman to keep him informed of their airport security review.

Q Is the final report due next Friday?

MR. CARLSON: No, there is no time for a final report.

Q The recommendations we thought were coming up January 9.

MR. DUVAL: I think Secretary Coleman established a time frame for the Administrator of FAA, who heads an inter-agency task force, to report to the Secretary.

Q Coleman wants a report?

MR. DUVAL: I don't know what the deadline is, but the report will go to the Secretary.

Q There were no recommendations today?

MR. DUVAL: No, they discussed alternatives, but there were no recommendations.

Q What were the alternatives?

MR. CARLSON: As we mentioned, those are some of the measures taken to improve security.

Q What about the leads they are pursuing?
I didn't know they had any leads. What can you tell us about that?

MR. DUVAL: There is nothing dramatic, but there are investigatory leads that the local authorities are pursuing in coordination and cooperation with over 300 FBI agents and the agents of the Alcoholic and Tobacco Firearms Division of the Treasury Department, which has sent up some explosive experts to work with them.

Q Are these leads like that one woman that telephoned the police and they are still trying to find out what the explosive was? Are those the kind of leads you are talking about?

MR. DUVAL: Bob, I can't characterize it. The local authorities have jurisdiction and the Federal authorities are trying to work with them.

Q Maybe I can put it this way, Mike. Are there any solid leads?

MR. DUVAL: I don't think it is appropriate for me to comment on that.

Q The whole point that Bob is making -- when somebody says they are following leads, there is a suggestion that something concrete is developing. That is all we are trying to get at. There is always a suggestion of that kind when you talk about leads.

MR. DUVAL: The investigation, as Judge Tyler made clear to the President, is going forward very, very vigorously and everything is being followed up with a tremendous focus of manpower and effort, and virtually any help that can come from the Federal level is being provided.

Q But the problem we face here, Mike, is now for about a week you have talked about how great the effort is and how many men the President has ordered into this thing, but that doesn't mean a thing if you aren't getting anywhere. What we are wondering is are we all turning our wheels or have you gotten anywhere?

MR. CARLSON: I think it is inappropriate for us to sit here talking of leads and so forth.

Q Why? The New York Police are talking about it.

MR. CARLSON: You should address such questions to the local authorities.

Q How do you know all airports are tighter, that all airports have a tighter security?

MR. CARLSON: I think since the incident in LaGuardia, the effort has been to see that all airports tighten their security.

Q We do know many public lockers are being moved behind screening areas and the task force is focusing on that aspect of terminal security. Is it fair to say this is still the focal point of the task force?

MR. CARLSON: I don't think we should go beyond what we have said now.

MR. DUVAL: I don't think the focal point is anywhere near that narrow. I think it might be the impression it is, and that would be inadequate.

Q It is much broader than the immediate public areas of the terminal?

MR. DUVAL: Yes.

Q Is it true they closed all the lockers in every airport?

MR. DUVAL: Administrator McLucas said that there has been some closings and cited some specific examples. I don't recall him saying they are all closed. He, obviously, knows what the status is and could respond, but I don't know.

Q At some point we can expect there will be some new measures for tighter security at some airports?

MR. DUVAL: If that is appropriate. Certainly, Secretary Coleman and the FAA Administrator have authority to act in that area.

MR. CARLSON: Okay, on a different subject, the President has signed two bills and they will be making them available now: S. 1469 and S. 95, and he has vetoed the Common Situs Picketing Bill, H.R. 5900, and we have a veto message here.

Q Is this a new veto message?

MR. CARLSON: This is the actual message. I think what he did before was put out a Statement by the President why he was vetoing the bill--his intention to veto.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 6:22 P.M. EST)