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NEWS CONFERENCE

#85

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:03 A.M. EST

DECEMBER 2, 1974

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry to be late, but Dr. Kissinger is just back today and I wanted to spend a little time with him.

The President began working in the office at about 8:00 this morning and worked there until about 10:30, during which time he met with Don Rumsfeld, Bob Hartmann, Bill Timmons, Secretary Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft and myself. He then spent about an hour and 15 minutes with the NSC in the Cabinet Room.

Following that, he had a meeting with some staff members and Administration officials as part of his series of meetings on key issues to be taken up in the 1975 State of the Union Address. You are aware of this series, and today's subject was higher education.

At 12:45 this afternoon, the President will greet the two United Cerebral Palsy Poster Children, and there will be a chance to take photographs and film of that meeting. The children are 12-year-old Gregg Donaldson and seven-year-old Tracey Royal. I don't have the hometown here, but both are from the Washington area.

At 2:00 o'clock this afternoon, the President will meet with Roy Ash and other OMB officials to continue their regular series of meetings to prepare the 1976 fiscal budget.

The President is holding a news conference, as you know, at 7:30 tonight in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. You should plan to enter a half an hour ahead of time through the 17th Street entrance.

If you don't have a White House Press Pass, call the office and talk to Judy O'Neill, who is taking care of clearances.

The President will open his news conference with a brief statement on SALT and foreign policy.

MORE

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Q Is he going to give the details we have been expecting, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Has he heard from the Russians?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. The letter is here, and he will give the numbers tonight. So, he is going to open with a brief statement on SALT and foreign affairs and then will take questions about SALT and foreign affairs for about 15 or 20 minutes.

At that point, the President will have another brief statement dealing with the economy and domestic affairs and then will have 15 or 20 minutes of questions on those subjects.

As you know, we have been experimenting with the format for news conferences, and we would like to try this tonight. I think it will bring about more orderliness and will allow follow up questions to focus on the same subject rather than being all over the lot.

The follow up procedure that we followed in the past couple of news conferences will be **in force tonight**, so you can ask your questions and then you can follow up your own question, if you would like.

Q Does the President plan to announce any economic decisions tonight?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to have something to say about the economy in a prepared statement at the beginning of that segment of the news conference.

Q Would you characterize this as a major statement?

MR. NESSEN: I think you really ought to wait and see what he says. I would rather not say.

Q Can you tell us, is it an assessment of trends that he sees in the economy, or is it action that he is going to be taking or recommending?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just hold off and let you hear what he has to say tonight.

Q Will the two statements be available on an embargoed basis? As you know, this is a kind of awkward time for the first editions.

MR. NESSEN: The two statements have not been completed. I will have to wait and see.

Q It would be helpful, and as you know, this subject is extraordinarily complicated.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, that is fine for the first editions, but it would be handy to know what the President is going to say in advance of the beginning of the press conference. If you could get it out any time ahead of the press conference, so we could take a look at it, it would be better.

MR. NESSEN: We will try.

Q On both statements?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Now, there are a couple of phones outside of Room 450, and just in the interest of fairness -- since there aren't anywhere near enough to go around -- I think we will close those phones off and people can come back here to file.

Q Ron, is this going to run 30 minutes?

MR. NESSEN: I think it will run in the area of 40 minutes, probably.

Q Will it be telecast, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I read somewhere in the paper the networks said they were going to televise it.

Q How long will the statements be?

MR. NESSEN: Each statement will be in the area of three to five minutes.

After the news conference, he is going to leave the White House at about 8:30 and go to the Sheraton Park Hotel, where he will speak to the Scouter of the Year Banquet in Sheraton Hall. There will be a traveling pool going along, and full coverage there, and there will be a prepared speech for that event, which you will get.

Q Ron, do you know when that text will be available?

MR. NESSEN: Sometime this afternoon.

Q Ron, also, will the President take questions on any other subjects?

MR. NESSEN: Domestic and foreign, what other subjects are there?

Q Anything on domestic?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes, anything domestic.

Q You mentioned the economy.

MR. NESSEN: I meant economy and domestic, SALT and foreign subjects. I think that pretty much covers everything.

Some announcements now.

We are going to hand out to you here momentarily the exchange of letters between the President and Dean Burch, in which the President accepts with deep regret Councillor Burch's resignation. Dean has been a Counsellor to the President, concentrating mostly on political matters.

Q Effective when?

MR. NESSEN: Effective December 31.

Q Is he announcing a successor or will there be a successor?

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

Q Was this of the President's choosing? Did the President ask him to resign, or did Mr. Burch have other pressing matters? Where is he going? What can you tell us about the decision to resign?

MR. NESSEN: Dean has wanted to leave for a year now, I understand, and has stayed on. But Dean wants to go to work for a law firm in Washington called Pierson, Ball and Dowd. It is a communications law firm.

Q You are saying this has nothing to do with the drubbing by the public he took in the November elections?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Before you leave that, Ron, there is nobody now in the White House who is political adviser now that Mrs. Armstrong and Dean Burch are both gone. Is he going to fill those spots at all with political expertise?

MR. NESSEN: We just don't have anything to tell you yet about the new organization in the White House.

Q Not even whether or not it will be filled?

MR. NESSEN: I can't tell you that right now.

Q Let's see if we can go at it this way, really for the record. Hartmann and Marsh have the title of Counsellor. Does the President plan to stay essentially within the Counsellor range as the top staff rank or one of the top staff ranks, and does he intend to have roughly as many of them as we have had before, or is he going to cut it down?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you the other day, Jim, I would hope in the next two weeks we can give you a very complete briefing on the new White House organization.

Also today, in the way of appointments, we have William N. Walker of Washington as the Director of the Presidential Personnel Office. That is being announced today. He has been a consultant here since September, and he formerly was the General Counsel of the Federal Energy Office.

Q What does that pay?

MR. NESSEN: We will check that for you.

Q Ron, why did it take so long to announce that appointment since he has been doing the job for at least several weeks?

MR. NESSEN: Because of the policy of making sure everybody's clearances are back and approved before announcing people, with one exception.

Q He is more careful with his own appointments than with others?

MR. NESSEN: We made one exception, as you may remember.

Q When you say in two weeks you will have a complete reorganization, what does that mean, that one has already been done?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think I said before that we would have a briefing in which you would see what the personnel reductions have been and how the White House will be organized, or is organized, is being organized, and some other matters that you have expressed interest in on personnel matters.

Q Ron, along those lines, should we be taking that to mean that there is going to be a major reorganization, or are you just going to bring us up to date on what changes have already been made? I am not sure I understand.

MR. NESSEN: It sort of amounts to the same thing, I think, doesn't it, Dick?

Q No. If changes have already been made and you are just going to explain them to us --

MR. NESSEN: There will be some reorganizational changes, as well as personnel changes.

Q Ron, did you answer the question of salaries?

MR. NESSEN: I said I don't have it here, but we will get it.

Q I would still like to get all the salaries of the press assistants.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have those right here.

Q This announcement two weeks from now, will that be only White House staff, or will that include the Cabinet?

MR. NESSEN: It is only planned to be a White House organizational briefing.

Q Who does Walker replace?

MR. NESSEN: He replaces David Wimer, who you may recall left in September.

I don't have any other announcements to make.

Q Ron, is there still a talent bank in the White House, or has it gone with President Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean by a talent bank?

Q You originally had a talent bank, a computer input for calling on people to serve in Presidential posts. Is that still on hand in the White House, or was the one amassed by the Nixon Administration dismantled and sent off with him?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of the talent bank. I will check and find out whether it is here.

Is that about it?

Q The President said that on the sports page he would at least get a 50-50 break in your news coverage, and although he did say that in a humorous light, does he feel he is getting a fair shake on news reporting?

MR. NESSEN: Was this in the Newsweek interview?

Q No, it was in the testimonial last night.

MR. NESSEN: No, I have heard him use that same expression before. He is not talking about a 50-50 break in news coverage. I think he is talking about you have a 50-50 chance of winning or losing. I have heard him say it several times, and that is the way I had always interpreted it.

Q You don't think it is a criticism of the coverage?

MR. NESSEN: No. Have you read the Newsweek interview? There is a fairly lengthy section in there in which he is asked five or six or more questions about his views of press coverage, and he says he thinks he is being treated fairly by the press. He doesn't have any complaints about press coverage. He still thinks he has kept his friends in the press, and so forth. You should look at that. It is a fairly complete rundown on his feeling.

Q What is the speech tomorrow night?

MR. NESSEN: That is the American Conference on Trade.

Q What time and where?

MR. NESSEN: It is also at the Sheraton Hall and at the same time, I think, 8:30. We will get you the exact title.

Q Ron, one, can you tell us anything about the NSC meeting this morning? Was this basically to discuss the SALT talks and Secretary Kissinger's trip to China?

MR. NESSEN: You know we never talk about the subjects of the NSC meetings.

Q You can't say whether that was discussed then?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Secondly, can you tell us -- I thought maybe you were asked this before -- about the President's comments on the economy? Can you say one way or the other whether he will be announcing any actions even in the most general sense?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather have you wait and hear what he has to say, Dick, or look at the advance text.

Q This communication from Russia. Is that the aid memoir that was promised, and that is now available and that is what he will base his statement on, right?

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. That is a big leap. The communication I am talking about is the aid memoir which contains the numbers. He has known the numbers all along. It is not that the statement is going to be based on the aid memoir.

Q Is this an exchange of documents?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Each has agreed on the aid memoir and they exchanged it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, that is correct.

Q When did the letter arrive?

MR. NESSEN: They arrived in Washington, I think, on Saturday, and then there was some translating to do and so forth.

Q Are these identical?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen ours. I haven't seen theirs, either, for that matter.

Q Was it in the same form, a transfer of letters essentially saying the same thing?

MR. NESSEN: Transferring the memoirs, yes.

Q Did they essentially deal with the same matter just to make sure each side understands?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Did they match?

MR. NESSEN: I assume so. I haven't heard that they didn't.

Q Do you intend to make those public? Will they be made public?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I really don't know, but I will check and ask.

Q Will you check, Ron, because as this thing wends its way through Congress, this thing will become a matter of great interest, and in particular the question will come whether the White House makes it public or the Congress leaks it, so you might want to take it under advisement.

MR. NESSEN: I will find out.

Norm?

Q Can you tell us a little bit more about what tomorrow night's thing is going to be? Is it going to be a speech breaking new ground on trade or urging Congress to pass the bill they have had for over a year, or can you give some indication of what he plans to do?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, frankly, because I don't know what is going to be in the speech.

MR. HUSHEN: The President has not signed off on that.

Q What is happening tomorrow night?

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow night is the trade speech.

Q Were there any secret agreements at Vladivostok on the Middle East or anything else that was not disclosed in the communique?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, Helen.

Q Ron, is this letter from Brezhnev or Kosygin as head of state?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I can find out, though. I can check.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:20 P.M. EST)