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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:45 A.M. EDT

MARCH 20, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President, at 10 o'clock this morning, signed a message to Congress transmitting the third annual report of the Council on International Economic Policy.

This is done in accordance with the International Economic Policy Act of 1972. The report reviews the major global economic events and policy issues of 1974, with particular emphasis on the energy crisis, agricultural production and prices, industrial raw material prices and shortages, the Trade Act of 1974, the economic situations in the lesser developed nations, East-West economic relations, and foreign investment.

We have copies of the report here in the Press Office, as well as copies of the President's message that went with it. You can pick it up after the briefing.

The President is meeting at this time, and has been since 11:30, with the Transportation Secretary, Mr. Coleman, to discuss a number of issues concerning the Transportation Department and legislation which will be going up to the Hill shortly involving transportation.

This is the President's first private meeting with Mr. Coleman since he joined the Cabinet on March 7th. The Secretary did attend the Cabinet meeting on March 12th.

As you know, the President has been meeting with each of the new Cabinet Members as they come in to sketch out for him his general views on the areas handled by that Department and the approaches that he considers important.

At 12:30, the President will be leaving the South Grounds by motorcade to go to the State Department to attend the Foreign Diplomats Travel Program luncheon in the State Department Dining Room. The travel pool which will be going with him should congregate at the door about 12:20. We will have a text momentarily of the President's remarks.

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As I mentioned yesterday, this travel program is a privately supported program supported by contributions from business, foundations, and individuals so that foreign diplomats stationed in Washington or New York can see America and live with American families, take part in community life, and so forth. The program began in 1962.

Q How many will be there, and who are they, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: The Coleman meeting is over and lasted for 60 minutes.

We had a list yesterday of how many would be at the meeting. I will get it for you, Fran.

Q Do you have anything on the Coleman meeting, what legislation was discussed?

MR. NESSEN: They were planning to talk about the two bills the President is going to send up, one involving rail transportation reform and the other is the new highway bill that we have been talking about, among others.

The President has a meeting this afternoon with the Vice President. It is one of their periodic meetings. There is nothing unusual about it. That begins at 2 o'clock. They will be joined later by Jim Cannon, who is President Ford's Assistant for Domestic Affairs. They will discuss Domestic Council business.

Q They won't discuss Rockefeller's CIA investigation?

MR. NESSEN: The purpose of the meeting between Cannon and the President and the Vice President is Domestic Council business.

Q What about before he gets there?

MR. NESSEN: The President and the Vice President?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what they will talk about.

Q Won't they talk about obvious things? (Laughter) They would not just meet, would they, Ron, and just not talk about the thing that is up on top of the front pages all over the Nation?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, the meeting does not begin until 2 o'clock, and it is difficult for me to know what they are going to talk about before they sit down and talk.

Q I don't expect you to know everything they say, but wouldn't you normally assume they would be talking about obvious things?

MR. NESSEN: I just do not know what they plan to talk about, Sarah.

At 4 o'clock, the President is meeting with Secretary Weinberger and Director Lynn to review some ideas for the Higher Education Act for student assistance. This will be discussed on the Hill next week by Administration witnesses in testimony. The others who will attend are Jim Cannon of the Domestic Council, Dick Dunham of the Domestic Council, and Paul O'Neill of the OMB.

There is one personnel announcement today. The President is announcing the appointment of Norman H. Beamer, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, as a Commissioner representing the United States government on the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission. He succeeds Raymond E. Johnson, who has resigned.

Mr. Beamer is presently serving as a District Chief of the Pennsylvania Water Resources District of the United States Geological Survey, which is located in Harrisburg.

This Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission has three Commissioners from each of the states represented, and three Commissioners from the Federal Government. The Federal Commissioners are appointed by the President. They serve without compensation at the pleasure of the President. They do receive expenses.

The states which belong to that Commission are Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia.

The answer to your question, Fran, is that about 230 people will attend the luncheon at the State Department. They include diplomats and also government officials and people from some of the organizations who contribute to this program.

Q Ron, regarding other travel plans, the Prime Minister said the President agreed to go to Yugoslavia this year. Does the President agree with that?

MR. NESSEN: He agreed in principle to visit Yugoslavia, but no date was agreed on.

Q He said this year.

MR. NESSEN: I think he was in agreement in principle to go, but no date was agreed upon.

Q You are denying what the Prime Minister said, that it would be this year?

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Q As long as we are talking about travel, Giscard and Brezhnev, according to the Reuterswire services several days ago, were talking about a European Security Conference on June 30. Do you have anything on the President attending that in that general time-frame in Helsinki?

MR. NESSEN: I lost my notes on that, but I will try to make it up as I go along. They are making progress on the European security treaty. There are still some areas where they have not agreed, but they are making progress.

A treaty is foreseeable. If they continue to make progress along the lines they are, the United States would feel that a summit conclusion to that treaty would be something that we probably would want to go along with, but I do not have anything on the date.

It obviously depends on when and if the treaty is concluded the way it appears to be headed.

Q Ron, you said probably. Do you really want that word in there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You do?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You said if a treaty is foreseeable, or a treaty is foreseeable?

MR. NESSEN: I said a treaty is foreseeable. Let's see how badly I deviated. "The Congress has made good progress. There are still several unresolved issues. If the Congress is concluded along the lines that are now foreseeable, a summit conclusion is highly probable."

Q Would that be in Helsinki, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, probably, and the United States would participate. The negotiations are not concluded yet, so we need to wait and see how they finish up.

Q What does the U.S. have in mind in terms of a goal for that treaty and for the entire conference, in other words, what are the U.S. goals or hopes for the achievements of that?

MR. NESSEN: I have not briefed myself in that much detail, Walt, and I think the State Department could help you with that.

Q Ron, could we go back to Yugoslavia for a minute? The Prime Minister specifically said in the course of this year his visit was accepted. Is that not true as far as the United States is concerned.

MR. NESSEN: Let me check. There was an agreement in principle for a visit, and we need to check and see whether that included this year.

Q If the President goes to Helsinki, he could be expected to make other stops, couldn't he, along the way, either en route or on the way back?

MR. NESSEN: The trip has not been arranged yet.

Q Is there any more on what I think you said one time, that he had agreed to go to India and China also this year?

MR. NESSEN: I think that was announced sometime ago, and I have heard nothing to change it.

Q How about to go to India?

MR. NESSEN: I don't remember an agreement to go to India.

Q Kissinger announced it last October.

MR. NESSEN: Kissinger said something about it.

Q This year or next year?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know.

Q Ron, I did not hear your answer to Bob's question about the grand tour of Europe.

MR. NESSEN: There are just no plans now that I can announce.

Q Ron, if this big conference that is now being planned between energy consuming and producing nations comes off and involves more leaders attending, might the President also show up at that? I realize this is a little early.

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a little early.

Q What is the question?

MR. NESSEN: Would the President attend the meeting of oil producing and consuming countries if it comes off. I think it is a little early to think about that.

Q It is a U.S. proposal, and wouldn't it be strange if he did not since the United States and Martinique --

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it was announced as a summit conference. I don't recall that it was.

Les?

Q Ron, considering the fact that the President was for many years a resident of Alexandria, I am wondering -- following up Jim's question of yesterday -- has the President had anything to say about the FBI battering the door down in Alexandria without a warrant?

MR. NESSEN: I checked a bit on the episode. As I understand it, there was a warrant outstanding for the arrest of Patricia Hearst. The FBI had reason to believe that she was occupying an apartment in Alexandria, which was entered Saturday night by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents. A search warrant, according to the FBI, wasn't needed because there was no plan to search.

The FBI believes that the arrest warrant which it has for Patricia Hearst gave it the jurisdiction to enter the apartment. The Bureau, I am told, is conducting what they refer to as an administrative inquiry to determine what the facts are in the case.

This administrative inquiry is something the Bureau does internally. Normally, we would not announce it from here, but since there has been some interest in it, I did call over there and --

Q Could I follow up on that, Ron, and just ask -- I am not intimately acquainted with all the details of search warrants, but in other words, isn't this a kind of carte blanche where the FBI could raid any place in America, saying we think Patricia Hearst is in there. Doesn't this pose a problem, or are you familiar with it?

MR. NESSEN: Les, I really don't think we can go much further from this podium.

Q I appreciate very much your checking.

Q Mr. Nessen, why can't the President of the United States have Clarence Kelley, Director of the FBI, in right away and censure him for this great breach of privacy. It is really a breach of everything legal regarding privacy and search warrants. Anybody, any tenderfoot lawyer down in the sticks knows that. Why can't the President have Kelley in and demand an explanation. People in the United States think this is a very great breach.

MR. NESSEN: Anything else?

Q Will you answer that question, please?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, I believe I said the Bureau believes an arrest warrant --

Q I know what you said, Ron, but would you kindly carry to the President of the United States a request for an answer to this question and bring us back an answer from the President. Not from yourself, but from the President.

MR. NESSEN: I have said, Sarah, that everything I say at this podium should be taken to represent the views of the President.

Q I cannot believe that you discussed this with him and that this is his cold, hard approach.

MR. NESSEN: Would you want to restate the question you would like me to ask him?

Q Sure. I want you to ask the President of the United States why it is he has not had Clarence Kelley in for censure and demand an explanation of such a great breach of privacy. It shocked the whole United States.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Ron, does the President feel this matter was handled properly by the FBI?

MR. NESSEN: An administrative inquiry is underway and I think we need to let it rest there for a moment.

Q Did you have a chance to find out whether the President discussed the FBI with Mr. Levi before he was appointed Attorney General?

MR. NESSEN: In general terms, and emphasized privately what he had said publicly, which is that he expects that Department -- and all Departments, as a matter of fact, but that Department -- to operate in such a way that they do not violate people's Constitutional rights.

Q Who asked for the administrative inquiry? Did the President? Did the Attorney General?

MR. NESSEN: No, an administrative inquiry is an internal Justice Department or FBI matter.

Q Then, would it have been the Attorney General or would it have been Mr. Kelley?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to check over there, Walt.



Q Ron, I did raise it because from past questions, at least in my mind about it, that by saying it from this podium you imply the President, at least, approves of it, although you never said that directly. Is that what you mean?

MR. NESSEN: I don't even know how you would get that impression.

Q Walt just asked you, if the President directed it, and you referred him to Justice. You took a question on the subject. Now, I think you owe us a little more explanation of it. Specifically, does the President approve of it? Does he want it to go further or did he order it?

MR. NESSEN: The administrative inquiry is an internal Justice Department matter.

Q I understood that.

MR. NESSEN: As to who initiated it, I think you need to check with Justice. As I said, it is not even normal to announce it from here, but since you had some inquiries yesterday, I did call and find out where it stood. That is where it stands, but I do not know the intimate details of who ordered it, and so forth.

Q Ron, what I asked you yesterday, I do not think it has actually been answered. One of the questions I asked yesterday about this was whether the President had asked Mr. Levi, or anyone, for a report from the Justice Department to come to him. You have been asked that question today more or less inferentially, but your answer has been that there is an internal inquiry going on in the Justice Department. That we had already been told.

My question still remains, has the President, himself, asked for any kind of report to the Justice Department or FBI on this matter? If he has not, can you tell us two things: One, why he has not; and two, whether you anticipate that he will?

MR. NESSEN: One, as far as I know, he has not asked for a special report from the Justice Department on this matter. Two, I think was, why was it?

Q Right.

MR. NESSEN: There is an internal administrative inquiry going on, and I assume if it turns up anything that needs to be brought to the President's attention, it will be. As for speculating on the future course of action, I do not think I can, Jim.

Q Ron, in your first answer, you said, "As far as I know, he has not." This would indicate you have not discussed this with the President. Is this correct?

MR. NESSEN: I just do not think I need to talk about what I talked to him about. As I say, the answers from this podium should always be considered to be the President's views.

Q In that instance, did the White House agree with the notion the FBI puts forth that the warrant for Patty Hearst gave them a right to enter this house?

MR. NESSEN: What was the beginning of that?

Q Whether the Hearst warrant gave them permission, gave them the right, to break into this house.

MR. NESSEN: That is the FBI view.

Q Is that also the President's view?

MR. NESSEN: I think, pending the completion of the administrative inquiry, I cannot really go much further.

Q As a general matter, Ron, on all circumstances -- whatever law enforcement agency might be involved in whatever case -- does the President think an outstanding warrant against a person is justification for breaking into anyone else's home on the suspicion that that party is there?

MR. NESSEN: He expects, as I said, every government agency to operate in such a way as to not violate anybody's Constitutional rights.

Q Can we assume he is mad about this because Gerald Ford is a nice man. He does not approve of anybody going down and busting down doors. I cannot believe this man, who I knew on the Hill ten years, would approve of this sort of thing.

Q Ron, you are not going to expect me to wait until after the administrative investigation is finished before you answer that question I asked you a while ago, are you?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Good.

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Q Ron, when you call the FBI --

MR. NESSEN: Maybe that was my first mistake.

Q It may have been, but what I am trying to get at, it seems to me you were saying to us you speak for the President. But when you called the FBI, did you in fact say, "I am speaking for the President and I want to know about this matter." Or did you simply say, "What is going on?"

In other words, were you using your role as Presidential aide to order an investigation that would bring the results back to the White House or were you simply asking what was happening.

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I do not have any authority to order an investigation. As a matter of fact, there is an inquiry going on. I was calling for information to attempt to answer some of the questions that had been raised yesterday.

Q Ron, isn't it apparent that what they are really concerned about is not how are you relating to the Justice Department, not your call, but they want to know what does the President -- see, what I mean is, anybody can phone the Justice Department, Ron.

What I think Jim was asking, and everybody is asking, is what does the President feel about this? Did you ask the President about this or not?

MR. NESSEN: I do not believe I am going to get in the habit of relating my conversations with the President.

Q Could you speak to the President on the CIA business?

MR. NESSEN: Did I or could I?

Q Could you. Did you? Do you have anything to add on this?

MR. NESSEN: We are really not going to be able to talk about that today, either.

Q You cannot confirm that.

MR. NESSEN: I just really am not going to be able to say anything about that today.

Q Ron, what are the President's reactions to the situation in Vietnam, particularly the abandonment of Hue?

MR. NESSEN: Bob wanted to know reaction to some of the events in Vietnam. I think -- I am not going to start any more questions -- it is becoming increasingly clear that one of the factors in what is going on in Vietnam now is the lack of certainty about continued American aid. I say that this is becoming increasingly clear because you have the South Vietnamese Ambassador, Mr. Phong, saying, "If we are assured of long-term supplies, we can hold more land, but if we are not certain, then we must concentrate on the defense of our heartland."

He is the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington.

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Q When did he say this?

MR. NESSEN: He said this yesterday.

Q What did he say?

MR. NESSEN: "If we are assured of long-term supplies, we can hold more land, but if we are not certain, then we must concentrate on the defense of our heartland."

President Thieu made a speech to his country and said some similar things, and I am awaiting the text of that and will relay that to you. His remarks were along the same line, that the uncertainty about any future American supplies is one of the causes of his pullback.

I think it is interesting also that the North Vietnamese are feeling the same thing. One of the authoritative Vietnamese journals called Hoc Tap said that the current attacks are based partly on their belief that the United States is unwilling or unable to give South Vietnam the military aid necessary to survive.

Q Would you read that again?

MR. NESSEN: This is a paraphrase, but here is a quote, which maybe you would rather have. The situation they refer to is the situation of the South Vietnamese pulling back to conserve their fuel and ammunition.

"This situation indicates that the bomb and ammunition reserves of the puppet troops have decreased and that they are encountering great difficulties in fuel and in the maintenance, repair and use of various types of aircraft, tanks, combat vessels and heavy weapons."

Another quote from this North Vietnamese journal says, "The fact that the U.S. Congress has reduced by one-half the military aid requested by the Pentagon for Thieu in the 1975 fiscal year, and by 20 percent the economic aid compared with the preceding fiscal year, clearly reflects the difficult, multi-faceted situation now confronting the U.S. Administration."

So, it is clear that both the South Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese in their present situations are both affected by the idea that the United States may not send any more aid to South Vietnam.

Q Does that have a byline on it, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The gentleman's name who wrote the article is Truomg Chi Cuong.

Q How did it come to the White House?

Q Which magazine is that?

MR. NESSEN: It is published in Hanoi.

Q But is it the voice of some element of the government or party?

MR. NESSEN: I need to find out what its affiliation is. Do you mean like the military journal or the intellectual journal or whatever?

Q Since about 1965 we have been told by various public spokesmen for various administrations of the United States government that there was no reason whatsoever to put any stock whatsoever in anything that the North Vietnamese said. (Laughter)

When did the U.S. government re-evaluate the North Vietnamese press as a source of information? I can recall back in the Johnson administration, Kennedy Administration, Nixon Administration that various officials said we never comment on North Vietnamese propaganda.

I just wondered, has there been some re-evaluation? Do we now think they are a more reliable source of information to be used to justify U.S. policy, or how did that come about?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, I also quoted the South Vietnamese Ambassador and President Thieu, and the American assessment is the same, that the South Vietnamese are holding on to their fuel and their ammunition and the South Vietnamese fear that further support from the United States will not be forthcoming and, therefore, they feel a need to pull back and conserve to maintain their defenses.

Q Ron, does that mean that the White House is blaming what is happening in South Vietnam on the Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I would not like to say that, no.

Q Didn't that add up to what you just did say?

MR. NESSEN: You need to put whatever interpretation on it you want to. I am saying the South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, for whatever stock you put in them, and the United States' assessments are all the same.

The lack of surity on continued supplies of ammunition and fuel, plus the fact that there is not enough money to ship spare parts -- so a lot of the weapons are out of action -- and there is not enough money to do what the Paris peace accords permit, which is to replace destroyed weapons one-for-one -- these factors are considered to be factors in what the South Vietnamese have decided to do militarily.

Q Ron, there is one question that has never been asked here, either of you or of the President. I am just wondering, does President Ford really think the American people support his request for emergency aid for South Vietnam and Cambodia, and does the President really think the American people, as a majority, really care what happens over there?

Now that American troops are out, does he think he has the support of the American people on this issue?

MR. NESSEN: The polls indicate certainly that the majority of the people, when they are asked that question, answer in the negative.

Q Ron, does the White House subscribe to the proposition that the South Vietnamese are puppet troops?

MR. NESSEN: Let me just elaborate on my answer to Walt. The South Vietnamese seem, from everything you can tell, to be willing to fight for their own defense. No, there are no American troops involved and no intention of sending any American troops or other military help. They are willing to fight for their own defense, and the President feels that it is right to give them the means to fight for their own defense.

I think it is interesting to note -- and I am going to step back and wait for the hoots when I say this -- but the fact of the matter is that in the areas that the government has pulled back from militarily, there are tens and apparently hundreds of thousands of refugees moving out and away from the Communists, who are coming in to take over and moving into areas still controlled by the government, so that would indicate that a lot of people would prefer to live under government control rather than Communist control.

Q Maybe they are just trying to get away from a battle, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I am prepared for the hoots, but I think it is indicative of something.

Q Ron, you said it is the United States' assessment that the reason for the withdrawal from these provinces is a desire on the part of the South Vietnamese government to conserve fuel and ammunition in the absence of American aid.

The logic of that statement would seem to imply that you would be willing to deny the speculation and the reports that the withdrawals are actually in accordance with a deal or agreement or arrangement between President Thieu and the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese.

I have two questions. One, do you deny those reports as untrue, and what is your general comment on these reports that these withdrawals actually are part of a deal leading towards some kind of settlement?

MR. NESSEN: The South Vietnamese have denied them, Jim, and for my part, I can say that I have seen nothing that would indicate that there is such a deal.

Q Can you account then for the fact that the Vietcong are helping these refugees leave rather than conducting any kind of blood bath or massacre as the Administration has forecast?

MR. NESSEN: I am unaware of the kind of report of what you say is taking place.

Q Ron, did the President know in advance of the South Vietnamese government's plans to pull out of the areas of the central highlands, and out of Quang Tri and Hue?

MR. NESSEN: He is being kept fully informed by the American Embassy in Saigon, and I do not think it is proper to report on what was told at what point.

Q Can I follow up on that? Can you, without getting specific, say whether he knew in advance?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would just rather say he is being kept fully informed by the Embassy in Saigon.



Q Ron, can we go back to my question about the puppet troops and whether the United States government considers the South Vietnamese puppet troops?

MR. NESSEN: It does not, Peter.

Q That editorial says that they are, and you subscribe to the editorial.

MR. NESSEN: We subscribe to the magazine.  
(Laughter)

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Q Ron, can you tell us what is the current assessment on the general seriousness of the military situation and the continued viability of the two governments?

MR. NESSEN: I have thought about this a little bit and I think it is probably not the right place to do battle reports from, Phil. I just think that needs to come from the scene and not from the White House.

Q What about the political viability of the two governments?

MR. NESSEN: I have seen nothing to indicate that there is any question about it.

Q In view of the fact that the Thieu government is pulling back in order to conserve and does not expect to get massive U.S. aid in the future, is the Administration prepared to reduce its request for continued aid to South Vietnam from Congress in the next fiscal year?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in fiscal 1976, reduce that request?

Q Fiscal 1976.

MR. NESSEN: As I told you, the Administration is negotiating with Senators Church and Pearson on a 3-year terminal package of aid to South Vietnam and those negotiations are going ahead.

The President, meanwhile, has sent up a request for fiscal 1976.

Q Ron, Senator Church was at a briefing breakfast this morning and afterwards he said the negotiations have broken off, that the Administration request was so high as to be politically unsaleable on Capitol Hill. Therefore, there was no sense in talking any further.

MR. NESSEN: There is a difference in the numbers that the two sides began talking about. I checked this morning, and I am told that the negotiations, as far as the State Department is concerned, are still going ahead.

Q Ron, what is the Administration figure? The Administration proposal that covers three years.

MR. NESSEN: I think you know what the fiscal 1976 request is.

Q How much is that?

MR. NESSEN: It is 1.4 or 1.6.

Q Can you triple it for three years?

MR. NESSEN: Since they are talking about it, Mort, I don't think it is proper -- the Administration is on record with its 1976 request as it is required to be in the budget. Down the road, you know, it depends on how these talks with Church and Pearson come out.

Q Ron, does the President feel if the \$300 million in additional military aid this year had gotten to South Vietnam several weeks ago, that the South Vietnamese army would not have had to evacuate these areas.

MR. NESSEN: That is hypothetical. The aid did not get there. Congress is not dealing with it, apparently, with the urgency that the President feels is needed, and that the South Vietnamese feel is needed. I think it is a non-question to say "what if".

Q Ron, you seemed to acknowledge earlier that the President probably does not have the support of the American people in his Indochina aid request if the polls are being taken correctly. May I ask then, and this is a terribly important question, how can he possibly continue in pursuit of a policy that he does not have -- a policy like a war -- that he does not have the support of the American people on?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I disagree with you that he is pursuing a policy of war. He is pursuing a policy of providing aid to a country which shows every sign of being willing and anxious to fight for its own defense.

Q Let's drop the war, but how can he possibly, in good conscience, ask for this aid when he does not have the support of the American people on the issue?

MR. NESSEN: The President has never made his policies by public opinion poll, and won't in the future. He will do what he believes is right and, hopefully, convince the American people of the rightness of his course.

Q Ron, would you entertain a quick question on the economy?

MR. NESSEN: Any time, but I think we have a few more on Vietnam.

Q Does the President agree with Secretary Schlesinger's assessment that the United States has a longer, deeper and more emotional relationship with South Vietnam; and, therefore, the fall of South Vietnam will have a deeper impact on the United States than the fall of Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to tinker with Secretary Schlesinger's words.

Q Apart from Secretary Schlesinger, does the President feel the United States has a more strategic interest in the preservation of South Vietnam than Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see why you would want to have the President in the position of saying those people deserve their freedom more than these people do.

Q I didn't say "deserve."

MR. NESSEN: He believes both countries are fighting, have fought, and show a willingness to fight for their independence against attack and invasion. He believes that the United States ought to provide the aid it can to help them do that. I don't see why you would want to make a choice between the two.

Q My question had to do with the strategic interest of the United States.

MR. NESSEN: I think the President spoke to Helen about that at the news conference last week. It is clear from events in Thailand and the Philippines that what happens in both South Vietnam and Cambodia or what they perceive America's attitude toward those countries to be, does affect their own attitude toward us.

Just to answer your question, the request for fiscal 1976 military aid to South Vietnam is \$1.293 billion.

Q Ron, on that point, the Communists are charging that Congress cut the fiscal 1975 military budget by 50 percent. Is that accurate?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Because the request for fiscal 1975 was virtually the same as fiscal 1976, 1.3. \$1 billion was authorized. Congress put up \$700 million, so that is half of the Administration request.

Q Almost half.

MR. NESSEN: Nearly half.

Q Can you update us on the evacuation of Americans from Phnom Penh.

Have there been any late words from the Ambassador or from the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, no.

Q Ron, does the United States have any plans to get involved in a refugee or evacuation programs in Vietnam at this point?

MR. NESSEN: I think, obviously, what is happening there now is generating large numbers of refugees, as I mentioned to you, and I think if you look at what the Senate did yesterday with the foreign aid bill for this fiscal year, it is difficult to understand some of the cuts that the Senate voted for.

For instance, the figure for economic help for South Vietnam, which the Administration requested \$939 million, was cut more than half, cut by more than 50 percent. The need is certainly going to be greater with all these refugees flooding down to the coast. Yet, Congress apparently feels that less than half of what the Administration requested before this great flood of refugees began is sufficient.

Q Are there any plans for a specific, immediate emergency kind of evacuation or refugee feeding or care program; not long-term, but immediate?

MR. NESSEN: If Congress won't put up the money, it is difficult to know how you could do it. It is going to be a real problem in South Vietnam, and Congress apparently feels there is no need to help all those refugees.

Q Ron, I would like to go back to the negotiations between the Administration and Senators Church and Pearson. You indicate the negotiations are continuing and Senator Church says they have broken up.

MR. NESSEN: That is what I was told this morning.

Q You were told this morning they are continuing. Does that mean the Administration is going back with a new proposal to the Senators, and has that proposal reduced it?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten into the details, but the State Department can help you on that.

Q Ron, this morning Speaker Albert and other Democrats had a press conference to announce that they are sponsoring or introducing a \$5 billion bill to provide emergency public works to be administered at state and local levels.

Have you had a chance to examine this at all, or could you speak of your attitude towards it in terms of its implications for the Federal deficit?

MR. NESSEN: I really have not had a chance to examine that bill.

Q Speaker Albert was asked -- if I could get more specific -- what assurances there might be if this \$5 billion was authorized, the President would spend it, and he really could not reply.

MR. NESSEN: Is it a public works bill?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The President has recommended what he believes to be the best and quickest and most equitable way to turn around the recession, and that is a quick and simple tax cut of somewhere between \$16 billion and \$19 billion or \$20 billion.

The President finds it strange that Senators who are about to go off on an Easter vacation -- as the Chairman of that committee himself, Senator Long, pointed out yesterday -- the Senate has not taken one vote on a tax cut for anybody. It seems strange that the Senators are giving so much priority to their own pet interests and so little attention to the people's interests.

The people want money for purchasing power, and companies need money to expand and hire workers back, and Congress seems to be playing to the galleries as it loads this tax bill up with all their pet projects which are unrelated.

The President believes in tax reform, but to delay putting spending money in people's pockets so you can load up this bill like an Easter basket just does not make any sense.

Q These things that the people want, Ron, is that reflected in polls? Is that what you were citing there, as to their desires?

Q Ron, do you write your speeches? (Laughter) You just made a speech here against Congress that is totally outside -- it does not even react, it does not even answer the point that was raised in the gentleman's question.

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, let me say again everything I say here should be considered to be a reflection of the President's views and the question was, how did the White House feel about a \$5 billion public works program.

MR. NESSEN: I said the President believes the quickest way to turn the recession around is to pass his tax cut.

Q You went ahead or beyond that, and you said this matter of jobs for 250,000 people at \$5 billion did not take care of the people's needs. You made that statement.

MR. NESSEN: I will get you a specific analysis of the bill, which I do not have now.

Q Ron, is the Administration preparing a list of its own public works projects that would be acceptable in case Congress goes ahead with this?

MR. NESSEN: In the sense that you are talking about, the answer is no.

Q In what sense are they doing it, then?

MR. NESSEN: The Emergency Jobs and Unemployment Assistance Act does require that the agencies and departments submit ideas to the Commerce Department, the Economic Development Administration of the Commerce Department, for projects which would create employment.

Those ideas are then evaluated by the Commerce and Labor Departments, and that is going on now. Then, under the legislation, Commerce will send to Congress an assessment of the reasonableness of various proposed projects and an evaluation of them.

The reason I said not in the sense that you were perhaps suggesting was the departments are not out there beating the bushes trying to find projects to create jobs. The President believes that a quick and sufficiently large tax cut is the best way to create jobs.

Q Ron, are you suggesting that the President really feels this statement of yours, "Congress apparently feels no need to help all those refugees" -- I am wondering if, as a newsman, you can remember the early sixties where Cardinal Spellman was saying the same thing about the refugees, that we must show concern for the refugees.

Is it a lack of concern for refugees or is it several billions of dollars and 50,000 lives invested in trying to help refugees that bring us more refugees?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying the Senate vote yesterday cut more than in half the money that the Administration requested for aiding economically South Vietnam.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:42 P.M. EDT)