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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 10:50 A.M. PDT

APRIL 2, 1975

WEDNESDAY
(Palm Springs, California)

MR. NESSEN: You should have the announcement that the President has invited the President of the Federal Republic of Germany to a state visit in the United States on June 2 to 7. I think you have that.

Q Where is that announcement?

MR. NESSEN: That was passed out earlier this morning to coincide with the joint announcement in Germany.

You also should have an announcement of the President's intention to nominate Charles Mann of Asheville, North Carolina, to be an Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

We have an announcement of the intention to nominate Curtis Farrar of Kensington, Maryland, to be an Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

You should have the intention to appoint 33 persons to be members of the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1975. That Commission actually has 35 members, and there will be two further persons nominated shortly.

You should have an announcement of the intention to nominate two persons to the Board of Directors of the Communications Satellite Corporation.

You should also have the proclamation designating the week beginning July 25 as National Farm Safety Week.

You should have the resignation of Mayo J. Thompson as the Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission. You should have all that.

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The bible for the San Diego trips is ready. Due to the early departure, we have asked the hotel to open its restaurant at 5 a.m., and it will be open at 5 a.m.

Some of you have inquired about Mrs. Ford's schedule for today. She is leaving the house in about ten minutes. They will leave the Palm Springs Airport at about 11:30. She will go to the Burbank International Airport, and from there to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles, arriving at about 12:40.

She will attend an event, which I think you know about, will leave the Pavilion at 2:45, depart Burbank International Airport at 3:15 and get back to the airport here at 3:40 and be home at the Residence at 4:10.

The President is playing golf this morning at the Mission Hills Country Club. His partners are former Representative Jack Westland, formerly a Representative of a district in Washington state in the Congress. He is an old friend of the President's. He now lives in Monterey, California. The President has visited him and stayed with him and played golf before in Monterey.

The other two members of the foursome are Leon Parma and a gentleman named D. Darius Keaton. Mr. Keaton is a friend of Jack Westland and a businessman who lives in the Monterey area.

For dinner tonight, the President and Mrs. Ford, as far as we know at this time, will have a private dinner at home with Leon Parma and his wife.

Q Do you know what Mr. Keaton does for a living?

MR. NESSEN: Other than the fact he is a businessman, I have not been able to find out anything else about him. So, they will have a private dinner at home tonight with the Parmas, as far as we know.

The President will be working on a first draft of his foreign policy speech this afternoon. He has that now, and will work on it. He will have a meeting at 3:45 with Don Rumsfeld, Dr. Greenspan and Dick Cheney. He will also have a meeting at 5 o'clock with Bob Hartmann.

Q About what?

MR. NESSEN: About some of the speeches he will be giving for the rest of this week and early next week.

Q Has a decision been made as to whether the speech will be on the ninth or tenth?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You don't have a definite date?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

The President has asked him to come to a meeting at the house at 9 o'clock tomorrow night after the President's return from San Diego.

General Weyand will arrive tentatively sometime Friday. It is possible that General Weyand will fly to San Francisco, join the President there and fly back from there with the President. That is tentative, however.

It could be that General Weyand would fly directly here. In any case, Dr. Kissinger and General Weyand have been asked by the President to meet with him on Saturday. At this moment, we don't have a time for that meeting.

Q General Weyand is not going to Washington first, then, as originally planned?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q How about Schlesinger? Will he get in on that?

MR. NESSEN: At this moment, he is not scheduled to come.

Q Ron, will Dr. Kissinger or General Weyand, or anyone, be available after that meeting on Saturday?

MR. NESSEN: My plan, tentatively at least, would be to have pictures for whoever cares to take pictures, at the beginning of the meeting and then barring something I don't know about at the moment, I would ask Dr. Kissinger and General Weyand to come down here.

Q Ron, will you brief after the tomorrow night's meeting between the President and Dr. Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: Let me find out. I don't know that now, Ralph.

Q Ron, when you are scheduling the Henry Kissinger briefing, you will bear in mind, of course, with the Sunday papers we are three hours behind the East and two hours behind the Midwest, and so on?

MR. NESSEN: I do keep that in mind.

Q Will we have a text tomorrow on the speech?

MR. NESSEN: I think after this 5 o'clock meeting with Hartmann we will probably have a text for you tonight.

Just to give you a preview of Friday -- we will get the bible to you tomorrow -- but to give you a preview of it, it looks like a press bus departure at about 6:15 on Friday, so we will get the restaurant open again.

The President will leave Palm Springs at 8:40. He will fly to Hamilton Air Force Base near San Francisco, arriving at 9:45. Primarily, there will be three events there. That would be a trip to the geothermal field or the geysers.

We have two relatively small helicopters. We will be posting the pool for those helicopters tomorrow.

Q Yesterday, you were urging everyone to go to the geothermal field.

Q Yesterday, you said it was a sign-up thing.

MR. NESSEN: Anybody who does not want to go can indicate to Larry and then they won't go in the pool.

The President will have a lunch with Western Governors. I will give you the list of those tomorrow. We will have the same procedure for having the Governors come down and talk to you in the press room after the lunch.

Q How many will that be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: There will be nine Western Governors.

Q Where will that be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: It will be at the St. Francis Hotel.

Q Do you know where this field is? Is it near some town?

MR. NESSEN: 120 miles North of San Francisco.

In the evening, the President will speak to a dinner of the Bay Area Council which is a citizens and community leaders organization. He will get back to Palm Springs sometime after midnight.

Q Ron, will there be an advance on that speech, because it will be pretty hard to get anything in the papers.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is Kissinger traveling with him Friday?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, no.

We will have a clear idea of the advance text situation after the Hartmann meeting at 5 o'clock.

Just for your information, Secretary Schlesinger had a news conference at the Pentagon this morning, 40 minutes, open for coverage by TV and so forth. That concluded just before I came out here. So, your people in Washington will cover that.

Q Did he talk to the President before he went on the air?

MR. NESSEN: He talked to the President this morning by phone.

Q Did he give him an assessment of what is going on?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is right.

Q Ron, can you tell us why Dr. Kissinger is coming out on Thursday? Is it so he will have a chance to rest for a day or is there something so significant about that 9:00 p.m. meeting? He is not going to see him all day Friday?

MR. NESSEN: We have never had an actual schedule before so this represents no change of plans or anything. The President felt he wanted to see him at that time.

Q Ron, Secretary Schlesinger, in the news conference, as you probably know, refused to rule out the possibility of the United States bombing in South Vietnam. I am wondering if the President still considers that to be a viable option?

MR. NESSEN: I think you have heard the President say himself a number of times that he does not have any plans at all to do that, both because of his own inclination and because of the requirements of the law.

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Q Ron, if my memory is correct, the President has only spoken about no return of troops. I don't recall his ever mentioning no bombing.

MR. NESSEN: The law is very clear on that subject, Ralph.

Q Then what did Schlesinger mean?

MR. NESSEN: I would very much like to see the exact words that Schlesinger used, and I don't think I really have any --

Q What he said was, "It is not my decision to make. It is the President's." He went on to say the President is waiting for the General to come back to make any decisions on the use of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

MR. NESSEN: I would like to see the words. I think the President's views are clear on the record on that.

Q Ron, in this connection, have we ever discovered what happened to the South Vietnamese air force?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, just as a general statement, Phil Habib had a long news conference yesterday, and Secretary Schlesinger had a long one today, and the President will have one tomorrow. I don't know that I can really add very much to what has been said or will be said.

Q I don't think any have been asked that question, though. Seriously.

MR. NESSEN: It is not a question that I think can really be answered very satisfactorily from here.

Q But bombing is a live issue. It seems to me the question is pertinent, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I would not get myself in the position where I considered bombing a live issue, Peter.

Q Ron, is there anything you can say about the nature of the phone call this morning between Schlesinger and the President?

MR. NESSEN: They have talked every day this week, so it was in the nature of daily conversation about events.

Q Ron, the Post, I believe this morning, said that some analyst in the Pentagon believed it is all over, that Saigon is not going to be able to hold out against the Communists. Has the Secretary of Defense indicated anything of that nature to the President?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, as I say, the Secretary had a news conference, just finished, and talked about that subject, and the President will have one tomorrow. I don't think I can add very much.

Q Is the President aware of what the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington said today, that we had not lived up to the Paris accords and that being an ally of the Communists was safer?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen that, Helen.

Q Ron, have you had any requests for national TV coverage of the President's press conference tomorrow, or is it still strictly local and regional?

MR. NESSEN: Somebody handed me a note saying all three networks had decided to carry it.

Q It is going to be national television?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask the networks.

Q So, we don't get exercised about the bombing issue, which you say we should not consider a live issue -- I am paraphrasing your remarks now -- you said it is not the President's inclination, and also because of requirements of the law.

Are you saying he also has no plans then to ask Congress for permission to bomb in Vietnam? Is this his inclination, not to ask for that, or would you rule it out flatly?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he has no such plans.

Q Ron, is it still the President's intention to push for the \$522 million for South Vietnam and Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I feel, first of all, what future aid, for humanitarian purposes or otherwise, will depend partly on what General Weyand has to report to the President.

Q But not ammunition?

MR. NESSEN: I say the course of the future American aid to Vietnam will depend partly on what Weyand reports.

Q You said at first, when you first answered that question, "future aid for humanitarian purposes." By using that phrase, you open up the possibility of --

MR. NESSEN: I thought I said humanitarian purposes and others.

Q And others?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you tell us whether or not -- the word viable was used a minute ago. Is it still a viable proposition for the President to press for that military aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will have an opportunity to talk to the President tomorrow, Jim, and General Weyand is coming back with an assessment, so I don't think I can answer that.

Q Ron, what is the date for the foreign policy speech?

MR. NESSEN: The 9th or 10th of April to a joint session of Congress.

Q Ron, we have to assume, do we not, that General Weyand will have made a report of some kind to the President before he holds his news conference tomorrow, from what you are just saying?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he will have reported to the President before that.

Q Then how will the President be in a position to answer the questions you say he will be able to answer, but say in the second breath that it depends on what Weyand reports?

MR. NESSEN: I say it depends in part on what General Weyand reports.

Q Ron, if the law on the bombing issue is as clear as you say, why can't you say flatly that the President will not bomb, instead of saying he has no plans to?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see what you are looking for, frankly.

Q I am looking for a flat statement.

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how it could be much flatter, do you? The law forbids it, the President's inclination is against it, and he has no plans to do it.

Q Ron, you have not given us any indication of what the President's mood is for if the President has any reaction to the event in Vietnam. Can you give us any kind of reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have been asked that, Bob, every day, and I think it is what you expect the President's reaction to be. He has a great deal of sympathy and compassion for what is happening to the Vietnamese people. He continues to feel that this is a gross violation of the Paris accords, which were negotiated and signed in good faith by all sides.

Like any civilized person, he is greatly distressed.

Q Ron, could you expand on your remarks that it is not the President's inclination to bomb? Does that mean he does not think it would do any good, even if he had the authority?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really think that needs expansion, Walt.

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Q But it needs an answer to the question, why is he not inclined even if he had the authority to do it?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you ask him, Tom?

Q If I get to ask a question, perhaps I will.

Q Is he greatly distressed about the fate of South Vietnam or greatly distressed about the refugees or greatly distressed about the failure of the Vietnamization program?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I cannot accept the last part of your question.

Q You don't think it has failed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't really think I am going to get into a discussion of Vietnamization other than to say something I perhaps should have clarified a bit yesterday when I think Walt reached the same conclusion.

Vietnamization was intended to turn the fighting of the war over to the South Vietnamese -- supplied until they were able to afford their own weapons by American material help.

It was designed to remove all American troops from Vietnam, which it did. It was designed to lead up to a peace accord, which it did, which would get the American prisoners back, which it did.

It depends on South Vietnamese fighting their own war with American material help, and that is what is happening. That is a long way of saying I can't accept your statement.

Q You don't think they have had the help to end the fight?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I am going to open up the whole discussion here.

Q Can you give us any idea what the President feels his options are to do something about it?

MR. NESSEN: You will have a chance to ask him tomorrow, Ken.

Q If I could follow up on Peter's question, we are having General Weyand coming out afterwards and Secretary Kissinger coming out afterwards, but are we to expect that the President is going to be able to give us some kind of outline of the options tomorrow?

If he is, what is the purpose of the meetings afterwards? It seems to me you keep referring us to that press conference, but the reports are all coming to the President after the press conference.

MR. NESSEN: Lou, it would seem to me we are talking about two separate things here. We are talking about a news conference at which you will have an opportunity to explore some of the questions you have asked me. You are also talking about a series of meetings at which American policy will be discussed.

The purpose of the meetings is not to develop answers for news conferences. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss American policy.

Q Ron, yesterday you complained about news reports, which you said were misleading or careless because they said the President was blaming Congress for the collapse of the South Vietnamese Army or collapse of all Southeast Asia.

I noticed today in the Los Angeles Times that Ronald Reagan came away from that dinner with the President, and he said he and the President both share the belief that Congress is largely to blame for the South Vietnamese Army.

One section of the L.A. Times today said, "Congress is largely to blame." Reagan says he and the President share that view.

Q Why are you nodding? Are you saying yes?

MR. NESSEN: I did not hear the question. I thought it was a statement.

Q The question is, there is an inconsistency about the view that you said the President feels. You say the President feels that the failure to produce aid was a factor, and yet Reagan says -- according to this L. A. Times story -- that he and the President share the view that Congress is largely to blame for the collapse of the South Vietnamese Army. There is a difference in proportions there.

Q Does the President share that view?

Q Does the President feel that Congress is largely to blame for the collapse of the South Vietnamese Army as reported by the L. A. Times, which says Reagan says the President feels that way? Who is right?

MR. NESSEN: The President beliefs on this subject were accurately reflected in my briefing the other day, and I suggest you read carefully from the transcript and you will have an accurate reflection of the President's beliefs.

Q Ron, your answer on Vietnamization is very thought out. I would like to ask you, are you saying here that because the troops came back and prisoners were released, Vietnamization was successful?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I would try to put in a little bit of perspective what the aims of Vietnamization were. Because and Walt and others have flatly stated you felt it was a failure, I thought I would explain to you what the purposes were.

Q Wasn't the ultimate aim that these people would be able to survive as a nation?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I really don't think this is the place for a lengthy discussion of Vietnamization.

Q Do you have any reports from Saigon, from American officials there about the future of Thieu? There are reports today that his family has left Saigon.

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen those reports, Tom.

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Q Yesterday, you said you were concerned and disturbed, I think you said, by the misleading information you were given by a member of the NSC. I believe you said you were more disturbed about it than Secretary Kissinger was and you pretty much indicated you were looking into it. What has been the result? Is there going to be disciplinary action against that staff member or are you satisfied that it was an honest mistake? What have you found out?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is probably something we should deal with within the White House, Jim.

Q Ron, on the basis of the information that you got from this person, you gave to all of us, and thereby to the American people, misleading information, which is information you, yourself, said was misleading.

Now, when we attempt to find out what is going to be done about it, you take the position it is an in-house matter. You don't see any conflict in that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Bob?

Q Ron, trying to follow up on what Pete and Lou are getting at, we are faced here with, as everybody understands, a situation in which you are obviously stalling because you don't want to answer any of these hard questions, and you are indicating that the President will answer them tomorrow in a press conference, but in fact, you are also saying he is not going to have the basis on which to answer them until he has talked with his adviser from Saigon.

I am just wondering if you in fact can commit the President to answering these questions or whether in fact we are going to get another stall tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I think you probably ought to wait and find out.

There will be a lid for today. You might check back in the press room at 5 o'clock to see if there is anything posted.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 11:22 A.M. PDT)