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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

#209

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:10 P.M. EDT

MAY 9, 1975

FRIDAY

MR. NESSEN: I have an appointment with the President at 12:45, so I would like to move on so I can keep that.

Q What is the subject?

MR. NESSEN: It is a private meeting on a private subject.

Q Are you resigning, by any chance?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am not.

Q Are you being fired?

MR. NESSEN: I am not.

Q Are you being demoted?

MR. NESSEN: I am not.

You have the posted schedule for today. At 12:30, the President is meeting the West Virginia Strawberry Queen, Miss Jane Meek of Parkersburg. She is going to be accompanied by Harley Staggers.

At 2:00, the President will greet a group of college and university foreign students who are in Washington attending the 27th annual convention of the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs.

This is International Student Day as proclaimed by Mayor Washington and the President is expected to speak briefly to the foreign students' group. On the assumption the weather is going to hold up, the ceremony will be in the Rose Garden at 2:00. If the weather gets bad, it will be in the main hallway on the State Floor of the White House. There are about 600 students and 120 teachers and advisers. There will be open coverage of that.

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The only items on the schedule that I anticipate for tomorrow are the golf tournament and the OAS reception.

The President will be in the office in the morning before he goes to the golf tournament and will have some meetings with staff people.

Here are the coverage plans --

Q How about Camp David?

MR. NESSEN: I am getting to that.

Q Is the reception for coverage?

MR. NESSEN: I am getting to that.

Let's start with the morning and work our way through to the evening.

The travel pool will go by car from the West Basement tomorrow morning, leaving the West Basement at 9:00 a.m., and the travel pool will be back at the White House at about 6:30. The pool consists of AP and UPI and the AP photo and UPI photo, a two-man network crew and a network correspondent.

Once we get down there to the golf course, there are going to be a couple of golf writers, and others, who will join up in the pool at the scene.

As you know, this pool will follow the President all around the whole course. There will also be open coverage down there, for those of you who want to go on your own, on the practice tee, the first tee, the ninth green and the eighteenth green.

The President will leave by helicopter at 10:30 and get there at 11:00; leave the golf course about 5:00 and get back here about 5:30.

As I mentioned to you, the facilities are somewhat limited in terms of food and refreshments and bathrooms and telephones. There are about a half dozen telephones. The parking is also limited, I am told.

Tomorrow evening, the OAS reception for the OAS General Assembly begins at 7:00. The President will have remarks in the East Room and that will be open for coverage. There are a large number of delegates attending.

What we will do is take over an expanded pool to cover the remarks and also to cover the beginning of the receiving line. Also, we will have the remarks piped back here so you can hear them in the press room.

We will take over all the cameras and all the photographers and if there are not that many writers interested in going over, we may take over all of them. Otherwise, if it is too many, we will have a pool and pipe the remarks back here.

People planning to go over for filming should be here at 6:00 so you can get set up. The writers who want to go over should be here at 6:30 to go over.

As I say, if there is enough room, we will just take everybody over.

Q Will you have a text for this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we will have a text for this but we will check on it.

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Q Does that mean, when you say just cover the remarks, they won't be allowed to mix and mingle with the guests at the reception?

MR. NESSEN: They will be able to cover the beginning of the receiving line, but not the reception.

Q Not to mix and mingle with the guests?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: The same reason, that it is always that way.

Q No, indeed, it has not always been that way. It has always been exactly the opposite. You are starting something new with this, Ron. You did that to us the other night with the International Women's Year. You are starting something new. That is not true. It has not been true for 30 years or 40 years or more. I wasn't around. (Laughter)

Q That is really true, Ron. We should be able to cover the reception as well.

MR. NESSEN: The fact of the matter is, it is going to be that way on receptions. They are considered to be private social events.

Just incidentally, there are a number of reporters representing the wire services, all four wire services, I think, and some newspapers who are there as invited guests.

Q That does not help the rest of us.

MR. NESSEN: I know.

Q You are starting something that is very limiting. For an open Administration, you are beginning to be more strict than the others have been.

Q That is right. This is not a social event in the sense that it is not newsworthy.

MR. NESSEN: It has been that way for receptions since the beginning of this Administration.

Q No, it has not.

MR. NESSEN: I think it has.

Q No, it has not, Ron.

Q Does the President have some personal feeling about this, that reporters should not be at social occasions?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, there is no use arguing about this because it is considered a private social reception.

Q It is not private when you have 200 editors.

Q Ron, it is a legitimate question. It doesn't have to be considered argumentative. It is a legitimate question. Is this at the President's request?

MR. NESSEN: This fits in with the President's views, also.

Q Why does Mr. Ford feel this way about reporters? This is a brand new rule. This is going back to something that Kennedy tried temporarily and then stopped.

MR. NESSEN: Since the beginning of this Administration, all the receptions have been private events.

Q I beg your pardon. I have been to them, and I have gotten some good stories.

MR. NESSEN: There was one reception that was open, and that was the International Women's Year reception.

Q No, no. The White House reception we cover, the State Dinner.

MR. NESSEN: Wait a second. That is something separate, Sarah, than these late afternoon receptions. As you know, there are reporters taken over to the State Dinners. They do mingle with the guests. It is a pool arrangement.

Q All right, if we do that for State Dinners why can't we do it for the Organization of American States?

Q This is a legitimate question. It is a curb on open Administration, if you don't permit reporters to cover the social event on the other side of this house.

Q This is not a meeting of Ford with Republican politicians.

Q Every other Administration, at least in the past 14 years, has permitted us to cover receptions so we think this is a very severe incursion on us.

MR. NESSEN: I understand your feelings, all of you, but this is the way that receptions will be handled.

Q Ron, as long as you are being beaten over the ears on a problem, I have a housekeeping problem. I am wondering what the reason is for the pool helicopter being abandoned. It seems to me when we initially started having Presidential helicopters we felt it was very important to have a pool helicopter because if the President had to suddenly set down somewhere on a flight he would have no coverage at all, and you are apparently abandoning that policy as well.

MR. NESSEN: We are not abandoning that policy. On this particular trip, the feeling was that because of the shortness of the flight and the landing area down there, and also the cost. Even the Secret Service is going by car because there will not be a Secret Service chopper, either.

Q Then this is not a policy change? Normally, you will still have them?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, we will.

Just to go on with weekend plans, the President and Mrs. Ford do plan to go to Camp David after the OAS reception. They will probably leave here around 8:30, and they will be back on Sunday evening. We will not have anybody from our office up there, but as always, we have somebody on duty on Sunday by telephone.

You have a little package of announcements, which include the nominations, three of those, to the California Debris Commission --

Q How do you get on that Commission, Ron? Do you talk back to the General? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: No, you throw beer cans out the car window.

-- the nomination of Malcolm Toon to be the Ambassador to Israel, succeeding Kenneth Keating, and the announcement of the renewal for additional five years of the NORAD agreement with Canada.

Q We don't have that.

MR. NESSEN: I will read it to you.

"The United States and Canada have agreed to renew the North American Air Defense Agreement for an additional five-year period."

This took place yesterday through an exchange of notes at the State Department. The NORAD paper is in the press release bins.

Q Ron, what is the salary of these guys on this Debris Commission?

MR. NESSEN: Can we get a little background on the Debris Commission?

There is no salary, but you just get all the litter you want. (Laughter)

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Q Isn't this kind of a trashy job? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is a pathetic one-liner, Peter.

That is all I have.

Q Ron, on Sunday at Camp David, is there any special Mother's Day festivity planned?

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked, actually, on what he plans to do for Mother's Day.

Q Ron, what was the President's reaction this morning to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's statement last night at the toasts?

MR. NESSEN: I did not hear any particular reaction to it, Dick.

Q He was nodding affirmatively when Lee was talking about the need for speaking in one voice between the President and Congress. Do you have any reason to believe that was not an indication of his agreement with what Lee was saying?

MR. NESSEN: I think you heard the President speak out on bipartisan foreign policy. Some did ask me yesterday what had been the reaction of foreign leaders to this week's series of meetings in which the President, in each one, emphasized the American commitments after Vietnam.

I think, rather than dig up an answer for you, I noticed that Lee Kuan Yew has obviously spoken out. Prime Minister Whitlam and Prime Minister Wilson have both held news conferences here, so if I don't get back to you with an answer on that, it is because three of the four have spoken out publicly.

Q Can we move to the energy bill? What is the President's reaction to the bill as passed by the Ways and Means Committee, and is he planning a last-ditch energy battle?

MR. NESSEN: The Ways and Means Committee, I think, has given tentative approval to it. I don't think it was given final approval. I think that was put off until Monday. Basically, the view here is that the Ways and Means Committee, so far, has not appeared willing to pass a bill which accomplishes the goals that were set out, the goal being to save two million barrels a day in imported oil by 1977, and to become essentially independent of the insecure and expensive sources of foreign oil by 1985.

The view here is that the bill, as drafted, does not meet those goals. Frank Zarb considers the bill to be really a half a program rather than an energy program. A half a program because it does not do anything, as far as he can determine, to encourage the production of sources of energy in the United States, so that the United States can free itself of increasing dependence on the Arab oil and other oil from overseas which can be cut off or raised in price at will.

The feeling of Frank Zarb, and others, is that this bill really amounts to a marshmallow program in terms of not meeting the goals.

Q Ron, that being the case, assuming the thing is reported to the floor in its present form -- and that vote Monday is supposedly just going to be a formality -- then, can we assume that this bill is not going to meet the timetable the President has set up for an acceptable bill by the end of the month, and he is going to go ahead with the second dollar of the import fees?

MR. NESSEN: There is a way to go in the legislative process and Frank and his people are in negotiation with Chairman Ullman and Congressman Dingell, and others on the Hill who are working on the energy bill.

So, this is by no means considered to be the final Congressional answer on this matter.

Q You mean you are hoping on floor amendments, then, when the thing reaches the floor?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly the thing is going to be amended on the floor. Efforts will be made to amend it on the floor. I just can't, at this point, based on a tentative committee agreement on a half a program -- I am just not in the position to say what the President will do. But the fact is that I think you would have to say the clock is running in terms of his extended deadline.

Q Ron, there are a number of Republicans on that committee who voted for amendments to weaken the bill, repeatedly voted for amendments to weaken the bill. Does the President plan any discussions with these Representatives?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that the President personally will be talking to Members, but certainly, the Congressional liaison staff -- each of the Departments have liaison staffs, too, Interior and Frank's office -- so there has been a good deal of contact.

Q Ron, we would not be wrong in assuming the Administration might lean on these people?

MR. NESSEN: I would not say "lean on these people." The Administration is advocating strongly the President's approach to this.

Q Ron, do you have anything to give us on the strip mining bill, and a related follow-up: What are you going to see the President about at 12:45?

MR. NESSEN: On the strip mining bill, there has been no decision on whether to sign or veto. Some people are going in to see the President at 12:45 -- Fred Ward and Hugh Sidey are going to give the President a copy of their book and he asked that I be there for that ceremony.

Q Ron, could I try to pin you down a little more on this energy bill? Would you say if the bill, in its current form, should reach the President even though it has a long way to go, that he would in effect veto the bill as it is now?

MR. NESSEN: You know, Aldo, it is so far along to talk about this bill ever reaching the White House in its present form.

Q I can't pin you down?

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Q Ron, is there any comment here on the stoning of the U.S. Embassy in Laos?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know it had been stoned, so I obviously don't have any comment.

Q How about the military activity in Laos? Does the White House view that with concern?

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

Q Ron, now that the President has gone through a period of reassuring allies, and he has spent a lot of time concentrating on the Vietnam evacuation, do you detect that he is spending more time on domestic problems at this point?

MR. NESSEN: I don't detect any shift. He faces both problems and some weeks there are more foreign problems and some weeks more domestic problems, but I don't see a pattern.

Q Is the President going to ask Senator McGovern to come in and talk about Cuba?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans like that.

Q Why not, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans, Peter. At the moment, there are none.

Q Ron, do you have the answer for me to my question of yesterday about whether the Soviets violated their agreement with us?

MR. NESSEN: I do. I talked to Joe Laitin a little while before I came out here, and he said there have been extensive briefings at the Pentagon about that matter. I told him you were curious about it and he said to have you call and he will put you in with the right people.

Q Darling, I called the Pentagon. I am very familiar with what the Pentagon has said on this because I do my research before I ask a question, for your information.

MR. NESSEN: I know you do.

Q My question to you was, what does the President think as to whether the Soviets have violated their agreements with us, whether Castro violated agreements by having these maneuvers in Cuba.

MR. NESSEN: As I understand it, the maneuvers were in international waters.

Q The maneuvers were not all in international waters, and we had agreements they violated, if you look back on the agreements that even Mr. Nixon admitted having. So, you still don't have the answer to the question of what the President thinks about this?

MR. NESSEN: The answer to those questions you asked about the maneuvers are available, Sarah, and have been given to others who asked the question.

Q What does the President think about it, Ron? Does the President think they have violated agreements? That is not in the Pentagon. The answer to that question is here at the White House, and it is certainly not in the Pentagon, I assure you.

MR. NESSEN: Well, it is in the Pentagon.

Q No, it is not. I have been to the Pentagon. I know what they say. I know what they can't say. I know how far they can go and how far they can't. I know the answer to my question is here at the White House.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I did pursue that for you and --

Q With Laitin, but not with the President, right?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, if the aim of the question was to obtain as much information about the military maneuvers --

Q No, it was not. I had that information, Ron, before I asked the question. If you go back -- I gave the question to Joy when she came and asked me for it again yesterday, so I know you have the right form of the question, and the question was asking you to get information for me from the President.

MR. NESSEN: The information is available at the Pentagon.

Q Not what the President thinks about this because they would not dare say that.

Q Ron, does the President have any plans to visit one of these military posts where the evacuees are being received?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, back to Cuba a second. Would the U.S. like to see the question of resumed trade with Cuba put back on the OAS meeting agenda?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to give you on Cuba.

Q Ron, concerning the coming meeting in Brussels, what does the President feel about the announced absence of the French President and even of the French Premier? Does he have any feeling on this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to give you on the NATO meeting.

Q Ron, has the President asked Leon Parma to serve on a campaign election committee?

MR. NESSEN: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EDT)