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NEWS CONFERENCE

#224

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:20 P.M. EDT

MAY 21, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: There were the usual meetings with the staff people at the beginning of the morning, and then at 10:00 the President met for an hour with Republican Senators who will be running for re-election next year.

These Senators have been meeting periodically among themselves to discuss the 1976 election, and they had wanted an opportunity to discuss their plans, and the President's plans, and so this meeting was arranged.

I think you talked to some of the members outside. The participants included Senators Beall, Brock, Roth, Hugh Scott, Stafford, Taft, Weicker, and Buckley, who are running for re-election. Senator Stevens was there in his capacity as Chairman of the Senate Republican Campaign Committee. Fannin and Fong, who are running for re-election, were not present because they had other appointments.

At noon, the President, as some of you saw in the Rose Garden, greeted the recipients of the 1975 Small Business Awards.

At 2:00, the President will meet with his Labor-Management Committee. He has done this periodically when they have been here for a meeting. They are having a day-long meeting today and he is stopping in at 2:00. The discussion today will deal primarily with problems facing the electric utility industry and discussion of the expected economic recovery.

At 3:30, the President will meet in the Cabinet Room with a group of Republican leaders from larger cities who are in Washington to take part in a seminar given by the Republican National Committee.

At 5:00, the President will meet with his energy and economic advisers. He will be considering what administrative steps he might take if the House goes home for a vacation without taking some action on the energy legislation.

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Q Ron, could you take a question on that?

MR. NESSEN: Surely.

Q You say "if." Isn't it definite now that they are not going to do anything before the recess? They decided that yesterday. In light of that, can't we just pretty much assume, in view of what the President told the Republican Congressional leaders yesterday and his earlier remarks, that he will go ahead with the second dollar of the fees?

MR. NESSEN: The President feels that as long as the House is still in session, there is still hope that they would be able to do something.

Q It has been taken off the calendar, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: This is what he expressed to me this morning, that as long as they are in session, there is still a hope that they could take some action on a meaningful bill.

Q He was in the House for a long time. If it has been taken off the calendar, do you think he really expects anything to happen in the light of his experience?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, they are still in session. Also, you must remember that not only is it just the mere fact of taking up legislation, but he wants, obviously, action on meaningful legislation because the bill, as it came out of the committee, and you already know the President's views on that, that it is inadequate.

Q Ron, does the picture indicate that we are going to have something afterwards?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. I would not anticipate any decisions will be made at this 5:00 meeting this evening, but I will be there and I can either post or tell you what went on there if there is anything substantive to report.

Q Isn't it an either/or situation? If there is no action on the Hill, is he going to go ahead or is he going to think about another extension?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to consider all those matters at that 5:00 meeting.

Q Can you give us a list of those Republican leaders?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Could we have it before they go in?

MR. NESSEN: I have it right here. Why don't we just post it because it is reather lengthy.

Q Fine.

Q What are you talking about?

MR. NESSEN: The Republican leaders in the larger cities.

Q A total of about how many?

MR. NESSEN: Twenty.

Q If I could get back to the energy bill, I am puzzled on something. Doesn't the President want the House to pass that energy bill that came out of the Ways and Means Committee?

MR. NESSEN: Not that bill, no. He wants them to make progress on meaningful energy legislation before they go home for another holiday.

Q You said earlier, a week or so ago, that there was hope that the bill could be amended on the floor.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. There were over 100 amendments proposed, I understand.

Q So, when you say "not that bill," you mean not that bill unless it is amended.

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q Ron, what is the timing on the decision for the extra dollar? Does he have to announce it by a certain time?

MR. NESSEN: In his last Executive Order, I believe he said that he had delayed until either May 30 or June 1 -- June 1, I believe it was -- up to 30 days from when he took the previous action, which was April 30.

Q So, he would not necessarily have to wait 30 days, he could do it before the European trip?

MR. NESSEN: I just want to caution you against focusing down on the extra dollar because the decontrol is also a possibility, but I would say if the House does go home without taking action on a meaningful energy legislation, that I think there is the possibility of doing something before he goes to Europe, a real possibility.

Q Ron, speaking of the trip to Europe, there are some reports from Brussels that President Giscard d'Estaing will now come to Brussels and attend the dinner given by the King on the 29th.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Has there been any prior contact between the French and U.S. governments on that account, and has the President expressed any reaction of the news that Mr. d'Estaing will be there?

MR. NESSEN: I saw that report and I think what I just prefer to say is that if we have anything to add to the announced events on the European trip, we will do it, but I don't have anything to announce this morning.

Q Will you take another question on the European trip?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I may have missed this on the flight back from Charlotte, in which case I apologize, but is Secretary Kissinger or a senior American official, as he is sometimes called, going to brief on Saturday or Monday on the trip?

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten it nailed down 100 percent, but I think there is a very good chance that somebody would brief on Saturday. If it is that senior American official we all know and love so well, he is going to be leaving to go back to Europe on Monday, so it has almost got to be Saturday.

Q Have you got just a tentative time, just a rough time for guidance?

MR. NESSEN: I am told he is meeting with the President between 10:00 and noon, so I would look for early afternoon or early morning.

Q Another question on the trip. The Vatican has announced there will be this meeting of the President and the Pope.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What does the President intend to discuss with the Pope besides Secretary Butz?

MR. NESSEN: I don't accept the premise of your question, Les, that Secretary Butz would be a subject of the discussion between the President and the Pope.

Q Do you have any information as to what he will discuss?

MR. NESSEN: I have a few announcements about the trip and maybe, as I get to those, this could possibly be clarified.

Q They include the Pope?

Q Ron, coming back on fuel, one, for energy, when you say that there is a good possibility of the President doing something, you are referring to the oil import duties?

MR. NESSEN: I am referring to administrative action.

Q That could include the decontrol and import duty, right?

MR. NESSEN: But don't forget, it is not just a simple yes or no question. There is a matter that if he did decide to do one or both of those, there is also the matter of timing and the matter of amount.

Q Ron, are you suggesting to us that there is some possibility that if Congress does not do anything before it goes home, that the President will not propose this be done?

MR. NESSEN: I am just suggesting that you not leap ahead too far until he has made the decision, and certainly he is not going to make it before he has this meeting this afternoon. I am not sure he is going to make it at the meeting.

Q Ron, there is some confusion about the President's particular power to decontrol. As I understand it, the Congress has five days in which to override. Are those five working days or are those five calendar days the same as a pocket veto?

MR. NESSEN: Working days.

Q So, if they go on vacation, they still have the days?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, while on that subject, does the President have the same information as The Post reported this morning that the price of oil is due to go up soon \$2.00 a barrel?

MR. NESSEN: This is the story reporting that the Shah of Iran is possibly thinking of raising --

Q Possibly based on that.

Q The foreign oil producers, plural.

MR. NESSEN: No, there is no confirmation that I can give you on that, but I do think that even the speculation about it, or the possibility of the happening certainly focuses attention on the purpose of the President's belief that the United States needs a meaningful energy program to eliminate dependence on foreign oil.

The United States is in the position now where foreign countries who supply at present 38 percent of all the oil the United States uses, and soon will provide 40 percent, and with no end in sight of the increasing dependence, those foreign countries are now in the position of being able to, at will, not only raise prices which upsets the American economy, but cut off the supply if they wanted to, and that is the very purpose of the President's energy program, and why he believes that Congress needs to pass an energy program, so the United States, as quickly as possible, can get out of the position of being at the mercy of foreign countries who supply oil.

Q Ron, some of the Republicans who emerged from the meeting with the President this morning -- the Senators, that is -- were rather political on the subject and as good as said that their Democratic colleagues were a do-nothing Congress on energy. Does the President share that view, and do you have anything you would like to say of a political nature on the subject?

MR. NESSEN: You know me, Walt.

Q That is why I asked. (Laughter)

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MR. NESSEN: The facts are there. The energy bill was introduced January 15, and this is May 21, over four months ago, and if the House does go out of session without even debating the bill, much less not voting on the bill, they are in the position of not even debating it.

I think also it focuses attention on the strip mining legislation, which the President has vetoed because from January 15 until today, Congress has passed exactly one piece of energy legislation, and that is a bill that would raise coal prices, reduce coal production and throw people who work in the coal industry out of work.

The President thinks that that is not a very good record by Congress on energy legislation, and that is the only piece of energy legislation that Congress has managed to pass.

Q How much headway did the President make with the Shah? I mean we have this quid pro quo sort of on the military aid and so forth. Did he not impress the Shah at all in terms of oil prices?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what, if any, conversation they had about oil prices, Helen.

Q Walt's question was, does the President share in the viewpoint that it is a do-nothing Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have expressed the President's views in his words.

Q Well, he would not identify himself with those terms, Ron. Yes or no?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if it is a question. I cannot answer that question yes or no, Les. I have given you the President's views in his words.

Q Ron, do you have any further questions on this oil matter? Can you take a further question on the oil situation?

MR. NESSEN: Sure.

Q As you know, the figures on the Gross National Product in the first quarter showed a decline in annualized decline 11 percent, which was about a percentage point higher than expected --

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q -- or, in other words, a deepening recession. What impact does the President think that an increase, and at the same time less progress than had been hoped for in curbing inflation, what impact does the President think a further increase in the oil tariff would have on the twin problems of the recession and inflation?

MR. NESSEN: I want to remind you that the figures you are referring to reflect what has happened rather than what is going to happen. They were for January, February and March.

I don't know. We talked before, I suppose, about the effect of the ever higher prices set by foreign countries beyond our control on the American economy, and one of the reasons we are in this mess is because of that factor.

The President's program has the long-range goal of getting out from under that dependence, so that we don't have our economy upset by others who set oil prices at their pleasure.

Q I was not asking about what the Arabs did or may do. I was asking about the impact of a Presidential action; in this case, the increase in tariff on oil.

MR. NESSEN: That really ties in with what I said, Jim, which is you know about the temporary, one-time only increase in the cost of living that would be brought about by any Presidential action that would raise prices, but he feels that that is the way to discourage consumption, stimulate domestic production and once and for all get rid of foreign countries being able to have such an effect on our economy.

Q You know, what I am asking is, I suppose, we could assume that he is weighing the impact on the economy if he further raises the tariff on oil.

MR. NESSEN: I see what you are getting at.

Q How great does he think that impact will be? I am speaking not only of inflation, but also of recession.

MR. NESSEN: There is no change in the President's view and that of economists here at the White House, as well as the economists in the private sector, that the upturn will begin this summer after the middle of the year.

Q Do you mean even including the figures?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. You had to pull that one out, didn't you?

Q Is there a fear that if he imposes higher oil prices and the decontrol of oil allows the price to continue just one time only -- the increase you mentioned a moment ago -- is there a fear that increase in the cost of living is going to postpone the turnaround?

MR. NESSEN: No. You have to keep the ultimate goal in mind, which is to get out from under dependence.

Q What is the basis for the feeling that further inflation attributed to things like an oil tariff increase will not slow down the recovery?

MR. NESSEN: Actually, I don't want to go beyond my competence, and I prefer that you talk to the economists, who can give you more details on that.

Q Ron, the President's energy program originally contained a tax portion that would offset the effects of the tariff and the decontrol. That portion is no longer even being remotely considered anywhere. Now, isn't this a lopsided program that could push us even deeper into recession now if he did go through with only one portion of his own energy program?

MR. NESSEN: I know what you are getting at, but the payback of the higher taxes on oil imported and domestic and natural gas and so forth, the portions of the program to collect the revenue have not been put in place, Phil.

He stands by his original program, which was a balanced program that returned the money to people who were paying the higher prices. It is really up to the Congress to deal with that.

Q Through his own action they are going to be paying higher prices for oil with no turnback, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: Well, there has been nothing passed --

Q No, no, I am talking about --

MR. NESSEN: If he decides to take administrative action?

Q Yes.

Q To follow this up just a little further, we were talking earlier about the possibility of another oil price hike in September, the Shah and the others. The piece in the Post said this could result in 4 cent gasoline.

If you throw that in with the added cost of the import fees and decontrol, even though it is spread out over two years, isn't that going to be quite a bit?

MR. NESSEN: All of these matters that have an effect on the economy and so forth will be discussed at 5 o'clock, and there is not much I can go beyond that now.

Q In his veto message yesterday, he talked about domestic production going down. Does the President know why and does he feel that domestic oil companies are doing the maximum to keep domestic production up in this critical time?

MR. NESSEN: Talk to Carlson afterwards.

Adam, you were trying to ask something.

Q I was going to ask if you would read your next announcement.

MR. NESSEN: Thanks for asking.

Q And those which follow.

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow, as you know, President Senghor of Senegal will be here to meet the President at 10:30 and at 1 o'clock he will have a working lunch as host of President Senghor.

Some of you probably know that on Friday the President will participate in an interview with a group of foreign correspondents, who are based in the United States. This will take place at 11 o'clock in the morning in the Diplomatic Reception Room.

The plan is to pipe it back here as the interview is going on, pipe it back through the loudspeaker system, and also to provide a page-by-page transcript. The interview will be taped by the BBC for showing in England and other countries which are tied into the European Broadcast Union, I guess they call it, and the BBC plans to broadcast it at 6 o'clock London time, which is 1 p.m. here, so 1 p.m. is the release time.

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The questioners will be Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times; Adalbert de Segonzac of France-Soir; Jan Reifenberg of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; Marino de Medici of Il Tempo; and Robin MacNeil of BBC, who will be the moderator.

Q Is it one hour?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, an hour, starting at 11 a.m.

Q Did you say the working lunch for Senghor will be here or at the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: The working lunch for Senghor is here.

Q Ron, is this tape going to be put on the house mult system, and will it be available domestically after 1 o'clock?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean audio or video?

Q Audio.

MR. NESSEN: I am having a meeting with all these people this afternoon to work out the technical details.

I think that if the American networks have any interest in getting video tape, I think they have to contact the BBC and work out something with them.

Q What about the audio tape?

MR. NESSEN: That is what we will work out this afternoon.

Q Ron, will there be an opportunity for anyone to sit in in the room itself?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably not, Peter.

I think you have the announcement that the President is nominating Daniel Patrick Moynihan to be the American Representative to the United Nations, with the rank of Ambassador, and also U.S. Representative to the UN Security Council.

Q Is there a chance or a possibility that Mr. Moynihan will be brought into the briefing room at some point for a meeting with reporters?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen him around here for a while. I don't know where he is, actually.

Q There is some sort of what you might call some piled up questions we want to ask him.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

I think you know his biography. You have his biography.

The President is pleased that Ambassador Moynihan has decided to return to public service. As you know, UN Representatives have sat in on Cabinet meetings, and he will.

Ambassador Moynihan succeeds Ambassador John A. Scali, who is being offered another senior foreign policy position in the Government.

Q Can you say what that is?

MR. NESSEN: No, I cannot.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Can you check?

Q Has it been offered already?

MR. NESSEN: It is being offered, yes.

Q What is the job?

Q At this very moment?

MR. NESSEN: I can't --

Q He has a clearance. You cannot say it is a security problem.

MR. NESSEN: That is about all I can say on --

Q Is it a foreign post?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't say any more than that.

Q It sounds like he turned it down. Is that a fair assumption?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not a fair assumption.

Q Ron, Ambassador Moynihan was to appear at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on the UN today or tomorrow, and he cancelled out. Do you know why?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know why, actually.

Q Ron, can you explain the timing of the announcement? Moynihan's name first appeared a month or so ago, and you confirmed it at that time, and now the announcement is finally made. Is this security checks all this time, or what was the problem? Why was the delay?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know all the process that has to be gone through to appoint an Ambassador. There was no undue delay.

Q Why are you unable to tell us what Mr. Scali is going to be doing after all this time of weighing -- well, of processing Mr. Moynihan's nomination?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I just am, Dick.

Q An entire month?

Q The so-called Valeriani job?

MR. NESSEN: What is that Valeriani job? You mean at NBC?

Q No, no.

Q The spokesman for Kissinger. Is that a possibility? (Laughter)

Q Ron, is the delay connected with the location of a job for Mr. Scali?

MR. NESSEN: I just am going to leave it that Mr. Scali is being offered another senior foreign policy position in the Government.

Q What is the definition of "senior foreign policy position"?

Q Is that a \$60,000 job? That is what I want to know.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the faintest notion.

Q The President is not satisfied with Scali's work?

MR. NESSEN: I have a piece of paper here on the President's thoughts on Scali, which I can't find, but there is nothing symbolic about that. I did have that on my desk, and I left it behind.

Let me run through the other announcements.

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Q Can I ask a question about Moynihan?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ambassador Moynihan's rather articulate and tart response to the criticisms of Third World and developing countries, did that play on his ability to address those problems in those terms, playing any role in the President's decision to nominate him?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Did he have a part in the removal of Scali from the U.N.?

MR. NESSEN: No.

You have the other announcements, which are: The President nominating John Holdridge to be the Ambassador to Singapore.

The President is appointing 20 persons to the Collective Bargaining Committee in Construction.

The President has signed an Executive Order on compensation of Government officials. You have all the papers on these.

Timothy Barrow is being appointed by the President to the National Commission for Manpower Policy.

Now, some of you have inquired as to what information we might give out on the European trip as far as personal plans go, because it is only a week away. Let me say that there are no shots needed, no inoculations, that is. There are no photographs that you need to bring with you.

The weather in Europe is just about the way it is here.

Q As hot as this?

MR. NESSEN: It might be unseasonably hot, and it could be unseasonably cold, but it is about like Washington's weather.

No visas are required for the trip.

You don't need to turn in your passports until you get on the plane that morning. There is a possible exception for the pool traveling on Air Force One, but we will work that out later.

I think we can say that if you want to turn in your baggage on Tuesday, the day before the trip, you can do it all day on Tuesday, and that would be May 27th, in Ray Zook's office. Otherwise, you can take your baggage out to Andrews with you.

The times are not firm yet, but we should look for something like this: The President and Mrs. Ford leaving the South Lawn at about 7:30 a.m.

Q We are into Wednesday, now?

MR. NESSEN: We are on Wednesday, right.

Q 7:30, you say?

MR. NESSEN: 7:30 for the President to leave the South Lawn. That would mean that the press plane would probably take off about 6:45 or 7:00 a.m., and if you wanted to wait and take your baggage out there with you, it would mean you would need to think about getting there one hour before take-off time with your baggage -- in other words, 5:45 or 6:00 a.m. with baggage.

At the other end of the trip, coming home, the President is now scheduled to leave Rome at 8:00 in the evening, Rome time, on June 3rd, and that would mean that he would get to Andrews at about midnight that same night, June 3rd. The press plane would be along at whatever time was required for filing in Rome.

Joy and DeCair are working very hard on the trip books and we will put out at least part of them, I hope, by the end of the week.

Q There is a refueling stop for the press planes but not for the President. Is he flying direct?

MR. NESSEN: You've got me, Ralph. I don't know.

Q Have you announced West Point, yet?

MR. NESSEN: We have not announced it yet, but I think the President is going to West Point the day after he gets back, June 4th, to deliver a commencement speech. I guess the reason we have not announced it is that it is probably not firm.

Q Can we announce it today?

MR. NESSEN: I would not because it is not firm. I always like to wait until the President decides whether to go or not.

Q You don't seriously doubt it?

MR. NESSEN: You know, if he gets back late and wants to sleep in, or something. (Laughter)

Q Ron, will he get an honorary military degree?

Q They only did that with Calvin Coolidge. (Laughter)

Q Ron, is there any possibility that he will go to the National Governors' Conference the following week, which starts on Sunday, the 8th?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans for him to go.

The President does want you to know that he considers Ambassador Scali to be an outstanding American representative at the United Nations. He has the President's full confidence, and as I say, he is being offered another senior position in the Foreign Affairs field.

Q If he is outstanding, why replace him?

MR. NESSEN: There was also a question --

Q Answer?

Q That is a serious question.

MR. NESSEN: I know, and I just would rather not answer it. I don't have an answer.

Q Mysterious.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

I don't have any other announcements.

Q Ron, is there any White House reaction to the CPI today?

MR. NESSEN: You remember when the March CPI was put out and it showed only a three-tenths of one percent increase in the cost of living. I think we said here that that appeared to be better than we expected and was based mostly on a decline in food prices and so we didn't expect it to remain at that rate.

The figure for this month, six-tenths of one percent, indicates that that is right; it didn't remain at that rate.

I think the figures of the past couple of months, including the six-tenths of one percent in April, show that inflation is subsiding from the pace of 1974.

The Administration has indicated an inflation rate for the whole year of somewhere around 6 or 7 percent, and these kinds of figures indicate that the estimates are about right.

Q Ron, you said that you would probably get, during the scheduling, as to what the President is going to discuss with the Pope. Is this just a courtesy visit and has no agenda, or --

MR. NESSEN: No. What I mean when I mentioned that was that we will be getting the trip books out by the end of the week with an explanation of the purpose for each stop that you will find in there.

Q You don't know anything that he intends to discuss with the Pontiff?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not put it that way, Les. I think I would rather say that when we get the material out full and factually, you will find out what it is they are talking about.

Q Has the President gotten in touch with any next-of-kin personally by telephone, or personally?

MR. NESSEN: On the casualties: from the MAYAGUEZ?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Not yet, but he does plan to communicate with them either in writing or by phone.

Q As long as that subject has been brought up, will that communication -- or the communication -- that he is going to be making on casualties include the 23 Air Force personnel who were killed on the 13th of May in the crash of the helicopter in Thailand?

MR. NESSEN: That helicopter crash was not directly related to the rescue of the MAYAGUEZ.

Q How was it indirectly related?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that that helicopter carried air policemen and they were being moved from one place to another in Thailand for possible use in the rescue.

Q How about the two Americans in Iran? Is there any new report on that?

MR. NESSEN: The two Americans in Iran, the ones who were killed today?

The President deeply regrets this loss of life. I understand that the Iranian Prime Minister, and also other Iranian officials, have expressed their condolences. I also am told that the State Department will be issuing a statement on this subject today.

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Q Ron, a couple of questions on the MAYAGUEZ. First, how does the President characterize the casualty rate; that is, 5 out of some 200? Is that light, heavy, moderate, if there is such a thing.

Secondly, can you give us any information as to the intelligence evaluation of the President's order? Does he have any preliminary conclusions on why we didn't know more about the situation there and why we didn't know more about how many Cambodian troops were on the island, et cetera?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on whatever the intelligence capability was, Mort, nor did the President characterize the casualties. He is saddened by the casualties, saddened by the loss of life. He does feel gratitude and pride for the fact that these men were performing their duty and performing it well in their country's service.

He likens it, as I said before out here -- obviously there is a risk in any military operation, but he likens the sacrifices of these men to the risks that for instance policemen are on. Policemen are there to save and protect the lives of others, and occasionally in the course of that duty, they unfortunately make an extraordinary sacrifice of their own.

Q Ron, while we are on that subject, does the President have any second thoughts about this kind of an operation; that is, if another ship were apprehended -- as we took that Polish vessel, for instance -- would he wait for a longer time for diplomatic negotiations to run their course before he took military action?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to even think about the possibility of a hypothetical future case, Bob, but to answer the specific question, there are no second thoughts about what he did.

Q Ron, in the Daily News interview, the President said that there was a lapsed time of 60 hours between the first message to start negotiations and the attack. Could you give us the exact starting and lengths of those times? Can you fix that somewhat precisely for us?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't, but I suppose the starting time would be somewhere around the first public warning that was issued here -- I guess at 1:15 on Monday -- and the operation began at something like -- the order was given at 4:45 on Wednesday. I have to calculate those times and see if they add up to 60, but roughly in that area.

Q Ron, when the intelligence analysis comes through, will that be made public?

MR. NESSEN: I am not clear about what intelligence analysis you are talking about.

Q Didn't the President order a review of the intelligence that was available in advance of the MAYAGUEZ incident?

MR. NESSEN: He asked to have some facts pulled together about the other two ships, which had encountered difficulties in that area. Is that what you mean?

Q I thought it was more extensive than that as to why there was not more adequate warning in advance. I thought it was a much more extensive analysis.

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not.

Q Ron, any analyzing why the Marines didn't know that island was so heavily fortified and why they did not sweep those radio frequency bands that Captain Miller was using to negotiate his own release that indicated where the crew was?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that Captain Miller made any --

Q Captain Miller told some reporters in Singapore that he personally was on the radio to someone on the mainland who was in touch with the Supreme Commander in an attempt to secure his release. Now, supposedly, in combat situations, military intelligence sweeps those frequencies.

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard about that, Phil.

Q Are you saying there is no wrap-up report on the whole incident in terms of the President?

MR. NESSEN: The President has asked for some -- I don't know that he has asked for it. I know that there is some -- what is being looked into really is more the technicalities of the operation.

I know that some of the equipment, for instance, on the Navy ships didn't operate properly. I think it would be fair to say that the operation is being reviewed to see whether anything needs to be improved in the forces that were used. I think that would be fair to say.

Q Ron, have you figured out yet why it has taken so long to get this casualties business straightened out?

MR. NESSEN: That is something you really need to ask at the Pentagon, Bob. The President does understand that there were difficulties in getting these numbers together. He now feels that he has the accurate numbers. But why there was the delay, you need to ask at the Pentagon.

Q Ron, has he asked at the Pentagon?

MR. NESSEN: The Pentagon was aware of his feelings on the matter.

Phil?

Q The President has not characterized the casualty count yet. In your statement you indicated that he is certainly not alarmed. Is that a fair conclusion, that he is not bothered -- he didn't want any losses of life, but he is not bothered by the count?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, Phil, I think you know the President probably as well as anybody in this room, and you know that any loss of life would bother the President.

Q You know what I am talking about.

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q What appears to be a high count, 15 dead seems to be a high count for some people, but to the President, does this seem to be an excessive number of killed in action.

MR. NESSEN: He had hoped that none would be killed in action, Phil.

MORE

Q Does he consider the mission a success, still?

MR. NESSEN: The goal of the mission was to free the crew and the ship safely, and it accomplished that goal?

Q Ron, both the New Republic and Art Buchwald have raised this issue. If this protection is extended on the high seas to the MAYAGUEZ, what about the 132 boats that have been grabbed by the Equadorians?

MR. NESSEN: I think when that came up the other day, the same question, I think what I said was that that is being handled in a satisfactory way through diplomatic means.

Q You mean the Government anticipates that the Equadorians will stop grabbing our boats, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't say that, I don't think.

Q I just would like to know, what do you mean it is being handled satisfactorily?

MR. NESSEN: Through the diplomatic methods.

Q Ron, do you have any reaction to the reports, the interviews with the crew of the MAYAGUEZ, that the Cambodians had offered to let them go back to the MAYAGUEZ and offered to free the crew and the ship half a day before the Marine assault -- in other words, Wednesday afternoon their time -- but that the Captain decided against it because the U.S. fighter planes were firing on patrol boats in the Gulf of Thailand?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that report, Ted.

Q It was in The New York Times today, and it was on the UPI wire yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see it, but the feeling here is that by matching up the timetable of what the United States was doing with the timetable of what the Cambodians were doing, you will see -- or it is believed here at least -- that as the force was brought to bear the Cambodians gave way at each step and in fact freed the crew because of the use of force. I think the Captain of the MAYAGUEZ, from the quotations I read, shares that view.

Q Ron, did the President have the Republican leadership of the House and Senate in to dinner last night or after dinner last night?

MR. NESSEN: He had some Republicans from Congress in to dinner last night.

Q Who?

MR. NESSEN: What happened to that list?

Q What was the purpose of that?

MR. NESSEN: To talk about his Presidential campaign.

Q Ron, I would like to go back to the 23 that were killed in the crash of the helicopter in Thailand. You have taken this a step further than the Pentagon is willing to do by saying that they were for possible use in the MAYGUEZ operation.

If they were for possible use in the MAYAGUEZ operation, and that is why they were going from point to point, why shouldn't they be included in the casualty total, bringing it up from 15 to 38 dead?

In other words, if they had been put on this helicopter and taken from place to place because they were possibly going to be used in this operation, and that is when they were killed, why aren't they being included in the total of the dead? Otherwise, they would not have been killed.

MR. NESSEN: Your question is, why were they not included in the total of people killed in the operation to free the MAYAGUEZ, and they were not in the operation to free the MAYAGUEZ.

Q They had been put on a helicopter, in effect alerted, mobilized, whatever you want to call it, for possible use in that operation; 23 of them are killed but you are only reporting 15 dead in the operation. Why aren't they being included?

MR. NESSEN: They were not in the operation, Jim.

Q Ron, in view of the President's opposition to the new Federal spending at all sorts of levels, what does he think of the House of Representatives deciding to give itself more staff, more newsletters, and more trips home at public expense?

MR. NESSEN: He mentioned this morning that he thought it was interesting that they could find the time to do that but they could not find the time to do anything on the energy bill.

Q Does he think it is a wise way to spend the taxpayers' money?

MR. NESSEN: That was not the thrust of his comment. His comment was about the time it took and the attention it attracted rather than the money involved.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 1:08 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 6:20 P.M. EDT

MAY 21, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You can see how long the meeting lasted because it just broke up.

The discussion was entirely over the President's options on energy. He expressed some of the same thoughts I expressed to you this morning as to the failure of the House to take any action on the energy bill.

There are various things he can do. I think he reviewed them, in answer to Helen's question, either today or another day. They have to do with adding the second and/or third dollars and if so, when. They have to do with the decontrol and timetable for that, and when.

A factor I may not have mentioned to you before was that the law which sets price controls on certain oil expires August 31 so that is a factor to be taken into consideration. In other words, if that law is not renewed on August 31, price controls on oil go off automatically and totally.

So, these were some of the things -- and various combinations of things -- that he weighed and that were discussed. He asked a lot of questions. Some of the answers were not available there and he asked that the answers be brought back to him, and there was no decision made either as to what to do or when to do it.

Q Was there any sense of urgency about it?

MR. NESSEN: Clearly, the reports in the paper this morning of the possibility of higher oil prices by the Arabs sort of was reflected in the meeting the same way I reflected them to you this morning. That is, that if the Arabs do raise prices again, it is another demonstration -- and this was brought out at the meeting -- of the fact that we are at their mercy as far as price and as far as supply goes, and that the President wants his total energy program, his goals, to get out from under this dependency on the Arabs.

Q Ron, did the President ask for written recommendations about a course of action to follow?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Or for recommendations at all?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Were recommendations given today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you tell us anything about the incredulity he expressed at the inaction of the Congress politically?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, politically?

Q I mean, did he say the do-nothing Congress on energy?

MR. NESSEN: Are we back to that question again?

No.

You know his style. It is not that, and it was not the kind of meeting where the statements were meant for public consumption.

Q Will we have another meeting before he leaves for Europe?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I suspect so.

Q Any possibility that a decision would be made before that trip? Does that still hold?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, what can you say about the recommendations that were made today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think it is proper to report the recommendations that were made to the President in private.

Q Can you say there was a unanimity in the recommendations made?

MR. NESSEN: There was a unanimity in the thrust of the recommendations, which was that Congress had not acted despite extensions and extensions and promises by the Democratic leaders that action would be taken. I think there was unanimity that there needed to be action by the Administration. There were various ideas of timing and what action to take.

Q This lifting of the controls, is that on all imported oil or domestic oil?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean the August 31?

Q Domestic oil.

MR. NESSEN: That is the domestic old oil which now is under price controls, and the law, which authorizes those controls, expires August 31.

Q Do we have any domestic old oil?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Old foreign oil?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not foreign old oil.

Q Natural?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Natural gas, too?

MR. NESSEN: I see. Natural gas in interstate commerce also is controlled as to price, but that is not under the same legislation, which expires August 31.

Q Just domestic old oil?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Would we be wrong to conclude that he has pretty well given up on the Congress doing anything in the near future, and now he is taking it upon himself again?

MR. NESSEN: I would not go quite that far because, as you know, the House has not gone out yet, and as I said this morning, he still has a hope that maybe they would do something.

Q Aside from that hope, is he getting any signal from up there, Ron, or is he just sitting down there thinking, gee, I hope they do something before they leave Thursday night? I mean, what is the basis for the hope? There must be something.

MR. NESSEN: The fact that they are in session and getting paid by the taxpayers to transact business.

Q Before anything could be brought to the floor, they would have to get a rule. It has got to come back out of committee, and that would be impossible to get anything done in one day -- tomorrow.

MR. NESSEN: AS I say, until they go out, he believes they certainly have the opportunity to act.

There is a lid except, as I may have told some of you, Mrs. Ford will be returning at 8 o'clock, by automobile, and some have expressed interest in taking pictures or witnessing that, and Bill, I believe, will chaparone that group that would like to go out to the south driveway and see Mrs. Ford return, and the President will greet her here under the portico on the South Lawn.

Q Will there be any statements?

MR. NESSEN: I don't expect so.

Q Anything further on Saturday morning's briefing regarding a time?

MR. NESSEN: We really have got the problem here partly because Henry does not come back until late Friday night. He has got a very long meeting with the President Saturday morning, and it is not 100 percent locked up, but Brent indicates that 1 p.m. is going to be about the earliest that he can get to it. I apologize and understand Sunday deadlines, but we are just hemmed in.

Q Is there going to be a transcript of that?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes.

Q Is that going to be a senior official, or is that going to be on the record?

MR. NESSEN: I have not had a chance to talk to Henry about what the ground rules are. I think we will try to emphasize at least that the purpose of this is a briefing for the European trip because you know before the Far East trip we staged one of these, and it turned into an open news conference on the Middle East, and then we got to the Far East and everybody was not quite filled in on the trip.

So, maybe we will divide it into two sections and have a briefing on the European trip, period, and then maybe an open question on other events.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 6:26 P.M. EDT)