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NEWS CONFERENCE

#253

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 1:15 P.M. EDT

JUNE 23, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President met at 9:30 this morning, as we announced earlier, with a group of Members of Congress, namely, Congressmen Hamilton, Sarbanes, Whalen and Brademas, to discuss Turkish aid.

Really, they came down here at the President's invitation. It was really a further discussion of what they talked about last week. There were no resolutions to the matter. The President will continue to work with Congress on trying to resolve this problem.

I think you know, basically, the President's views on the need to have the House lift the restriction on aid to Turkey, and so that was that.

At 10:50, the President met with Hans Friderichs, the Minister of Economics for the Federal Republic of Germany. The President considers it to be a very friendly meeting. They discussed various matters of mutual interest, and particularly the mutual economic matters including energy and the European Community.

The President has had similar discussions on these matters recently with Chancellor Schmidt and with President Scheel, and this was a continuation of that.

Then, the President met with Labor Secretary Dunlop, and George Meany of the AFL-CIO. The President periodically has met with President Meany, or talked with him on the telephone. This was another of those meetings that the President feels it was a very amiable meeting. Mr. Meany wanted to discuss, among other things, unemployment, housing legislation, and the construction industry.

Q Can we ask a question on that now?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q Did he get any assurances on the housing bill?

MR. NESSEN: Such as?

Q Did the President tell you he would not veto the bill?

Q He is going to veto the housing bill?

MR. NESSEN: Tomorrow is the deadline, you know, and the President would prefer to reserve an announcement on his decision until ---

Q That has been announced. Are you back-tracking on what has already been announced?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we have announced anything here, Helen.

Q Well, Senator Scott announced it.

MR. NESSEN: Well ---

Q Let's put it this way, Ron: Do the objections you outlined last week and the week before still stand to that bill?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did Meany ask the President not to veto it?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend, but the President did describe the meeting as very amiable.

Q Ron, let's get clear about this veto. Scott and Rhodes came out here and said the President indicated he was going to veto it, and later on you said the Congressmen had already given you a readout on the meeting, so we assumed that you agreed with their statements.

Is it not correct that he indicated he was going to veto it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything to conflict with what Congressman Rhodes told you.

Q Mr. Meany apparently does not agree with Mr. Greenspan's statements on Sunday, from what he said out here. Do you have any comments?

MR. NESSEN: No. Alan Greenspan is the President's chief economic adviser ---

Q Chief?

MR. NESSEN: --- of the Council of Economic Advisers, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers.

Q I thought that Secretary Simon had been designated as the Administration's chief economic spokesman some time ago.

MR. NESSEN: Spokesman, that is right; and Alan Greenspan is chief of the Economic Advisers Council.

In any case, from what I read, Greenspan's forecasts for the economy yesterday are just in line with private economists' estimations of the economy. I don't know of any major economist who disagrees.

You just came in from the Rose Garden, some of you, where you saw the two surviving Soviet pilots who made the first transpolar flight in 1937; and the third Soviet pilot, that third pilot was killed in a test flight in 1939, and so he was represented by his son today.

Incidentally, the three pilots, shortly after they made their flight in 1937, were received and greeted at the White House by President Roosevelt.

The pilots are in the United States as guests of the Vancouver Transpolar Flight Commemorative Committee. It is a private group which has been sponsoring a week-long celebration commemorating the first non-stop transpolar flight in June 1937.

I think you saw a model of the plane. It is a one-engine plane that flew non-stop from Moscow to Vancouver, Washington, in 63 hours; the distance is 5,288 miles. They were greeted at the airfield where they landed in Vancouver, Washington, by the then General George C. Marshall. As I said, they were received at the White House.

This was considered to be a major contribution to world aviation history. They were honored by their own country as Heroes of the Soviet Union, and to the Russians this has the same significance as the Lindberg flight to Paris.

As I say, one of the pilots was killed in a test flight in 1939 and his son represented him today.

There have been a series of commemorative events this past week, including the transpolar flight of a Soviet IL-62 jetliner from Moscow to Seattle, the dedication of a monument and park to the Soviet pilots and their achievement, near Pierson Airfield in Vancouver, where they landed, and they also visited the Boeing Aircraft Corporation, at Everett, Washington, and also in Portland, Oregon.

They will leave the United States and go back to Russia on the 24th of June, tomorrow.

At 4:00, the President will have a meeting with the Defense Secretary Schlesinger. They meet periodically to discuss departmental matters.

This evening the President and Mrs. Ford will go to Wolf Trap for a buffet dinner and a performance of the Metropolitan Opera. The opera tonight is "La Boheme." There will be a travel pool that will go along and they should be here at 5:45, and they will leave for Wolf Trap at 6:00. The President is expected to get back here about midnight.

Q Ron, on the Schlesinger meeting, I think it was last week you were asked a bunch of questions about nuclear policy and you said you were going to try to find answers.

MR. NESSEN: On nuclear policy?

Q Yes, on nuclear weapons policy, the use of tactical nuclear weapons and the possibility of a development of the U.S. counterforce capability. You were asked a number of questions about whether the President concurs in the development of those capabilities.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think what I found out was -- and I thought I told some people this, or I thought I told everybody -- that as I thought last week when you asked me the idea of a policy of flexibility is nothing new. This was talked about in 1972 by President Nixon in his foreign policy report to Congress, and over the last year and a half Secretary Schlesinger has also talked about it.

In the 1976 defense posture statement which came out some months ago there is a considerable discussion of this matter. The strategy of limited strategic limited nuclear forces is an option for the United States which provides the American Armed Forces with a capability for flexibility in its response.

As I say, I don't know why we need a very lengthy discussion of this since it has been around and talked about, and has been written about in policy statements, for three or four years, and the Secretary has discussed it extensively for a year and a half.

Q You don't notice any escalation in it?

MR. NESSEN: I notice there is an escalation in the questions about it, which is not necessarily an escalation in the ---

Q By Schlesinger you have not noticed that, including Korea and so forth? Europe?

MR. NESSEN: I, myself, have not noticed that, Helen.

Q Just to get the record complete, what you said at one point last Thursday or Friday that this was merely a one-shot exercise by the Air Force, you are now withdrawing and acknowledging that this is an option that has been put into the books?

MR. NESSEN: I was ill-informed last -- whatever day it was -- Jim, and upon further exploration I find that this is a matter that has been around for three or four years.

Q It is not just a one-shot exercise that the Air Force is going to be going through; it is something that has been added to the ---

MR. NESSEN: I think for the details of where it fits into America's planning and so forth, you need to ask the Pentagon, but ---

Q Ron, there is a very important policy issue that only the President can speak upon, and that is -- and I think other Presidents have been asked this question at various times and they have given various answers -- the question is, does the United States rule out being the first to use nuclear weapons in a war?

MR. NESSEN: You know, I love those questions, "Would you rule out?"

Q Well, ---

MR. NESSEN: I simply, Mort, am not -- I don't feel it is proper for me to get into that kind of detail when the Pentagon can adequately or more than adequately answer your questions. I did some research and found out in general where this matter stands, and have given it to you. It is not new and I think for those kinds of details you really need to address the Pentagon.

Q Ron, has the President authorized the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to implement this flexible approach?

MR. NESSEN: Well, Helen says don't I notice an increase in the talk by Schlesinger. I notice an increase in questions by the press, which gives it some sort of appearance of being a new matter or something that has just taken place, and that is what I am trying to ---

Q Well, it is new on the Korean thing?

Q Ron, if you will get the transcript of Schlesinger's press conference last Friday you will find it is not anything done by the press.

MR. NESSEN: I have a transcript of Schlesinger's press conference of last Friday and I don't know precisely what it is that ---

Q The whole thing practically is on that subject.

Q Ron, has the President entered into the record any comments on this question that Mort raises about the United States ruling out the first use of nuclear or tactical nuclear weapons, and can you endeavor to find out?

MR. NESSEN: I tell you folks I think we are into a discussion that is -- I think you are making a mistake going in this direction.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because, Helen, it is a matter that has been addressed in public formal documents for three or four years, and whatever I say in response to a question is going to make this appear that this week suddenly the United States has done something which it has not.

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Q So, you are saying there is no change in policy whatsoever?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I am aware.

Q But Ron, the question is, has anything new happened? There is some talk around that what is new is that the President has authorized a deployment of tactical weapons to implement this strategy. Is that true or isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: You mean a new deployment of weapons?

Q That is right.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of, but again, if you are interested in facts, the place to go is the Pentagon.

Q This all arose because there was a story published to the effect that the United States Air Force was now running practice missions with the possibility of abusing nuclear weapons for limited strikes on military targets.

As I understand it, this is an alteration of past orders that commanders have been given. Now, Schlesinger has spoken time and time again about the fact that he believes in the possibility of developing an American counterforce. It is not first strike; but nonetheless, counterforce.

They had a weapons debate in Congress about how accurate and how powerful the American weapons should be. We are developing a lot of weapons that will give us pinpoint accuracy, which can be used for killing hard targets, and it is a reasonable question about what the President's policy is on the matter, especially on the question of using the nuclear weapons first. That is a Presidential decision.

MR. NESSEN: I think the limited strategic forces is an option, as I said. The policy of a flexible response is not new, and the question of specifics -- where are weapons and when were they moved -- that is something that really can't be talked about here.

The point is, we can have a debate here, but if you want facts, the Pentagon is the place to get the facts.

Q Let's see if we can go at it from this factual approach. The same story that Mort is talking about said that portfolios of orders and instructions, the actual "how to do it" kind of thing, had been put into the hands of the appropriate Air Force officers and crews and so forth.

MR. NESSEN: And that is what I referred to as an exercise.

Q But with a deadline by the time they are going to have this material mastered. I believe the deadline was November 1 or something like that. Anyway, there was a specific deadline.

I have two specific questions about it. Somebody ordered this done, and my first question is, did the President specifically order this material put into the hands of the Air Force, or did Secretary Schlesinger or someone else say to the President, this is what we are going to do, and did the President approve it?

That is not a Pentagon question. That is a White House question.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I know it is a White House question, but I just don't think those kinds of specifics about military planning are normally talked about, Jim.

Q I am not asking what was in these instructions or anything else. That was all in the story. I am merely asking whether the President, for whom you are the spokesman, issued the orders that led to these kits being given to the Air Force, or did he approve the orders after they were given by someone else, Mr. Schlesinger or someone else?

I cannot conceive how that is a national security question or anything like that. It is merely a question of who ordered something done, and did the President order something done?

MR. NESSEN: Let me explore the matter further. I meanwhile suggest that for some of your questions you can go to the Pentagon. For the specific question of the President's role, if any, I will check.

Q Did you contemplate at one point bringing someone out here who was going to go through this routine with us on what the United States strategic nuclear policy is?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q As to your knowledge, before we get off the subject, has, to your knowledge, President Ford either as President or Vice President or when he was in the House perhaps, ever spoken out publicly on this question of a first strike capability or a limited nuclear war option? I am just asking, as a matter of fact.

MR. NESSEN: I would have to check the record on that, Jim, and see. I don't know for a fact.

Q Could you check and if he had could you give us the reference so we can look it up?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q So we can say that there is nothing new, there is no change?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, this has been talked about and written about in various policy statements for several years.

Q Let's just ask it one more way one more time. At some point since Mr. Ford became President, was this presented to him as an option, perhaps in a list of options or by itself, and did he then say, "All right, I approve this option"?

MR. NESSEN: All right. I know you want to know the President's role and that is what I need to check on more thoroughly.

Q All right. If you could check those three or four questions on the President's role, I would appreciate it.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Moving on to the announcements, the President will hold a news conference on Wednesday at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. If the weather permits, it would be outdoors; if not, it will be in the East Room. The weather forecast is not very promising at the moment.

Q May we expect an announcement of some sort at that time, a political announcement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate a political announcement.

Q Will this be for television?

MR. NESSEN: If the television networks care to carry it, they are perfectly free to.

You have already had a package of announcements which included the President nominating Frank R. Barniko of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission.

The President is also announcing the 13 recipients of the National Medal of Science. You have a Presidential statement and a release on that.

Also, the President is transmitting to the Congress the Annual Report of the National Foundation on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. There is a letter from the President and the full reports are available in the Press Office.

The President has signed a proclamation designating October 15 as White Cane Safety Day for 1975.

We also have given you the fact sheets, the letter of transmittal and the report on refugees. As you know, I mentioned to you the other day, there is a requirement in law that the President submit this report periodically and this is the first one. There will be a briefing by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Refugees at 3 o'clock in the second floor press briefing room at the State Department so they will answer your questions.

Q Ron, of course I have not read this thing here but there are reports. I have some queries about the refugees. Is it true that the policy of the United States Government is that none of these people are allowed to take office in the Federal Government?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, I do think that it would be profitable to first of all read the report and then secondly to attend that briefing.

Q You think this is going to be covered?

MR. NESSEN: It will be if you ask it.

Q Do you expect the President to formally declare his candidacy at the press conference?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Ron, I have a question about a page 1 story in the Star on Sunday. It listed as among the private or secret visitors the Reverend Billy Zeoli. Since the Reverend Zeoli has never been one to hide his light under a bushel, I was wondering who is it that wants this concealed, and are these visits a kind of a substitute for attending church for the President?

MR. NESSEN: Reverend Zeoli is an old friend from Grand Rapids and on occasion drops in to see the President.

Q But why are his visits concealed is my question and does the President feel that this is a substitute for attending church any more?

MR. NESSEN: It is not a substitute for attending church.

Q When did he last attend?

MR. NESSEN: I don't keep a record of that, Les.

Q Is there any way of finding out?

MR. NESSEN: We could review the schedule or you could review the schedule, whichever is faster.

Q The question is, why are Zeoli's visits concealed?

MR. NESSEN: I would not use the word "concealed," Les.

Q Not listed on the public list. It is the same problem we had for three or four days. Why is it a private visit instead of a public visit?

MR. NESSEN: He is a personal friend of the President's, as I say, and like other personal friends of the President drops in occasionally.

Q How often does he drop in?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, I would say in my nine months here he has probably been here twice or three times.

Q In his spiritual role does he come by?

MR. NESSEN: I think some of you know that when Mrs. Ford had her operation Reverend Zeoli did help to console the family and on other occasions his visits were not private because, as you know, the President attended, I believe, one prayer breakfast at one of the hotels at which Reverend Zeoli was one of the speakers.

Q Ron, does the President retain full confidence in William Colby as CIA Director?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, is the CIA assassination material going to the Church committee or must committee members and staff come here and make notes? Has any material at all been sent to the committee?

MR. NESSEN: Well, let me say first of all that there has been no complaint from the Church committee or the staff as far as I know. There have been no complaints.

There was this weekend made available the full material on assassination. The members and staff could come in any time this weekend, that is 24 hours around the

clock, and in fact some staff members came here on Friday, about seven or eight staff members, as well as Senators Mondale and Baker. On Saturday Senator Morgan was scheduled to come down, I don't know whether he did. We will check. He was scheduled.

The plan is to send the documents to the Hill. There was a plan to send them today. The fact is that the committee is not meeting today and so they will not go today but they will go to the Hill under guard where they will be available to the committee and then they will be there for as long as the committee needs them during the day, will be brought back to the White House in the evening and locked up again under guard. This is a procedure suggested by the committee.

Q Are these the original?

MR. NESSEN: They are Xerox, or I should say photocopy copies are being sent up there.

Q They can take copies of this material, did you say?

MR. NESSEN: No, I say the copies which are made available to them either here or the ones sent to the Hill under guard are photocopies.

Q This material does not go into the custody of the committee?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment this is the procedure, yes.

Q They will be in the White House every night at night?

MR. NESSEN: It will be locked up every night.

Q And they won't be allowed to copy it up there?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q It is going up today or has --

MR. NESSEN: It was but there is no meeting of the committee today so it is not going up today.

Q Tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Whenever they have their next meeting.

Q How many copies go up?

MR. NESSEN: I think there have only been two copies made or one copy made.

Q And this is the same material that they were able to come in here all weekend and look at?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Has this procedure been worked out, as recommended by --

MR. NESSEN: No, this is not the 86 page summary of facts. This is the facts.

Q How many pages is that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I said last week, it fills one file drawer.

Q The raw material?

MR. NESSEN: It is the raw material.

Q How do you describe it, as alleged assassination or --

MR. NESSEN: It is material relating to alleged assassinations that was gathered by the Rockefeller Commission.

Q On that same subject, Ron, and also going back to Mort's question of a couple seconds ago, Director Colby has said that the CIA had no connection whatsoever with the murder of Mr. Giancano in Chicago. Is the President satisfied that the CIA had no connection with that murder and has he received or requested any report from Mr. Colby on the matter?

MR. NESSEN: Is there anyone who charges that they were involved in it, Jim?

Q I haven't the faintest idea but the public record shows that the CIA Director has denied that they were involved and that is what my question is based on.

Q He has not ruled it out, he is not ruling it in?

MR. NESSEN: If Mr. Colby says they were not involved, the President believes Mr. Colby.

Q Has he asked for any report from Mr. Colby on this subject?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, does Mr. Colby, not just on this matter but overall, have the full confidence of the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Does Ambassador Helms continue to have the full confidence of the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why? (Laughter)

Q Ron, if Mr. Colby enjoys the President's confidence, what does the President think of his reports on Friday by CBS to the effect that Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Kissinger think he ought to get out?

MR. NESSEN: Are those accurate reports, I wonder?

Q My guess is that somebody like Rockefeller or Kissinger told a CBS reporter that.

MR. NESSEN: I have no way to answer that question, Adam, other than to say that Mr. Colby enjoys the full confidence of the President.

Q The question is what does he think of the reports? Now, has he tried to find out if they are accurate?

MR. NESSEN: He has no reason to believe that they are accurate.

Q Also, Ron, what does he think of Mr. Colby's destruction of evidence in 1973 without telling the White House?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I do think that the fact that Mr. Colby enjoys the President's full confidence is about all I can say on the matter.

Q You can say that for Helms, too?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I did.

Q Whatever became of Ambassador Scali? The last I heard he was still considered a valued member of the Administration. There is a new UN Ambassador. Is he an ambassador emeritus or is there still consideration for a job for Ambassador Scali? Do you know his status?

MR. NESSEN: We will check.

Q Ron, is the President pleased to have the endorsement of Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy for reelection?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see that one.

Q He said that he hopes the President is reelected and when that happens he will be one of the strongest Presidents the United States has ever had.

Q Here comes the New York vote.

Q Ron, is the President distressed over the rotting of his old home in Grand Rapids? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I am told that --

Q Sears has come up with an offer to paint the house. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: What was I told about that?

Q Do you have an answer on that?

MR. NESSEN: I might have.

What did somebody tell me about that this morning?

Q He has no desire to preserve it?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. He lived in about eight different houses in Grand Rapids when he was growing up (laughter) and he does not have any special feeling about the preservation of that one.

Q Ron, has the President asked for a report on whether or not the FEA or FEO give special favored treatment to the oil company doing business with Governor Carey's brother? The weekend report of intercession with Senator Sparkman and Hugh Carey.

MR. NESSEN: I will have to look into that one. I did not check on that this morning.

Q Can you give us any guidance on the July 4 weekend? Is he planning to be out of town?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see now. The July 4th weekend is Camp David. I believe two of the children have birthdays that weekend. It is also the Suharto meeting which we have already announced.

Q No political announcement that weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate one.

Q What about Fort McHenry?

Q What about travel that weekend, Thursday and Friday?

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

Q As you staff up for your political work, is it contemplated that the President will have a separate political spokesman other than you as a White House spokesman, or do you plan to be the spokesman on both political matters and White House matters?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think it will probably be necessary to have some sort of press office in the President Ford Committee.

Q What is going to be the name of the committee now for those of us who were too lazy to go over to the --

MR. NESSEN: It is the PFC, the President Ford Committee. What can you make out of that?

Q Have you ever been asked about the story that appeared a week and a half or so ago about the nomination of Mr. Mathews, the President of the University of Alabama, to be Secretary of HEW, and if so, what did you say?

MR. NESSEN: I said that when we have something to announce we will announce it.

Q Are you ready to announce that or to confirm that yet?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is the President going to Helsinki in July?

MR. NESSEN: There is nothing to go to Helsinki for at the moment.

Q For our guidance, when would you expect the cutoff deadline for an announcement one way or the other on the European Security Conference? In other words, how long before you have to make a decision?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I don't understand why you --

Q Well, because the Fins said they had to have at least four weeks' notice.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct, but if there is no agreement you cannot tell the Fins that you are ready to go with the signing ceremony.

Q So what is your cutoff date for the deadline?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, a cutoff deadline?

Q At what point do you say, well, there is just not enough time left to have one in July?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, I see. Well, I would take the last day of July and back it up four weeks and you know what it is.

I understand that Senators Morgan and Mathias came over the weekend to look at the material in addition to the other two Senators I mentioned.

One copy of the material will go to the committee on whatever day it is questioning witnesses to whom the material pertains.

Q The same day that the testimony is taken?

MR. NESSEN: Well, they are coming down here to look at it, Jim, and then when the witness is up there they send the material up there.

Q And the procedure is that a White House guard sits with the material while it is up on the Hill and then brings it back?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q How is the swimming pool coming along?

MR. NESSEN: I have not been out to look at it lately. Maybe after the news conference we can all go look at it.

Q When do you expect it to be completed, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: They have told the President that it would be ready for July 1st.

Q Are you going to lead us out there to take a look at this newsworthy item?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Now?

MR. NESSEN: No, not now. Maybe after the news conference.

Q Ron, are there any restrictions on the material while it is here, any restrictions on who gets to look at it?

MR. NESSEN: You mean who from the Church committee or who from the White House?

Q Who from the White House. Are there any restrictions?

MR. NESSEN: We will have to look into that. I don't know the answer to that.

Q Ron, has the President looked into the Rockefeller Commission materials on Soviet bugging of American telephones and if so has he directed any counter-measures?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think on that subject I am just not prepared to say any more than was said by the Rockefeller Commission concerning the capability of certain foreign governments to intercept domestic communications.

Discussions are continuing with Ambassador Scali but nothing has changed. He has been offered another senior position and is considering it.

Q What is that position?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think it would be fair to Ambassador Scali to let him consider it before we announce it.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:50 P.M. EDT)