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

#265

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:30 A.M. EDT

JULY 8, 1975

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President will make a statement in his office at noon. The cameras should go ahead in there now.

Q What about, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: You will find out when he makes it.

The pool is the wires, a CBS correspondent, New York Times, UPI audio, Newsweek, photographers and cameras. The photographers should not snap pictures during the statement. We will have copies of the statement available as soon as it is read, and there should be no live broadcast.

Q Are you going to pipe out here?

MR. NESSEN: It will be piped back here and plugged through the mult, but there shouldn't be any live broadcast of it.

Q Ron, a historical note. The last time the President made an announcement in the Oval Office with a pool and it was piped out here, it was the pardon of Richard Nixon.

MR. NESSEN: This will not be the pardon of Richard Nixon.

Q It is about as popular.

Q Why are you having pool coverage on this when everybody is interested in it? It seems to me it is in the President's interest to have as wide a coverage as possible.

MR. NESSEN: I am not exactly clear what the problem is. He is going to read a statement at his desk, which will be piped out here.

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Q Why can't he read it here?

Q Some people just like to see.

MR. NESSEN: There will be a pool in there.

Q What is the advantage of that?

Q Ron, we go in for all sorts of minor things.

MR. NESSEN: These are the plans that were made for this morning's statement.

Q How were they made, and with what considerations in mind?

MR. NESSEN: It was the way that the President preferred to read the statement he is going to read this morning.

Q Is he going to answer any questions?

Q Packard and Callaway and this bunch -- are they going to be in there, also?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you just wait and see. It is starting in 26 minutes.

Q Has there ever been an announcement of a candidacy from the Oval Office before, that you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the complete history of Presidential --

Q Is the statement going to be made available in advance?

MR. NESSEN: It will be made available as soon as he completes reading it.

Q May we stay here and then go down and turn on our machines just before he talks?

MR. NESSEN: Sure.

Q You say there is no live TV coverage in there?

MR. NESSEN: Or radio.

Q Ron, we can release it as soon as he finishes it?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q It will be filmed for later?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Will there be a briefing after that for questions arising out of what he says?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that Mr. Callaway and Mr. Packard and others will be holding a kind of open house at their headquarters this afternoon to answer questions.

Q Ron, how long will he speak? The statement will take how long?

Q What time is that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q I think the open house is tomorrow.

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten into their press plans over there, but I will ask, if it will help.

Q Do you know how long the statement will take to read?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure it is ready yet, Peter. It was late in coming.

Q We have deadline problems so that would be helpful, and we will respect the embargo on it.

MR. NESSEN: Let's see if we can do that.

Q Is all this mystery to build up the suspense?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, this is the way he prefers to make the announcement. There is no great mystery.

Q Was there any equal time involvement here that entered into the thinking on how he would announce it?

MR. NESSEN: It did not.

Q Ron, to your knowledge, how long will it take to read the statement?

MR. NESSEN: A maximum of two minutes, I would say.

Q There is not too much involved, no live coverage here. Would it be possible he could change his mind? Could you tell him a lot of reporters are here and ask him could he drop in here?

MR. NESSEN: This is the way he prefers to do it. There will be an opportunity on Saturday in Chicago to ask questions.

I do have a fair number of other things.

Q Can you guarantee that the pool comes out and gives us a pool report on any asides and additional color here before they file?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly will. There will be a pool report. I am trying to protect everybody.

Q As to why it is being done this way, is it because there is a feeling that this sort of announcement will de-emphasize the President's political activities and emphasize his Presidential role?

MR. NESSEN: I think you might want to wait and see the contents of the statement first.

There is one announcement today that the Treasurer of the President Ford Committee will be Robert C. Moot, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, and the Comptroller of the Pentagon from 1968 to 1973.

Q Where does he live, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He is originally from New Jersey. He now lives in Virginia.

Q What part of Virginia? Can we narrow that down?

MR. NESSEN: We will track that down.

Q Do you know his present job?

Q Ron, has there been a military coup in the President's election committee? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Mr. Moot was a career Government employee. He joined the Department of the Navy in 1946.

Let me just mention a few other things.

Saturday we do have the news conference in Chicago, and it is going to be the out-of-town news conference format, with local people asking alternating questions with the White House people. So, we will have the sign-up list. Maybe it is already out. If you want to ask a question at the news conference, you should put a little "X" next to your name. There will be a drawing on Thursday for positions in the list.

Q Do we get a set of dishes? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: That is right. We have the door prize drawing on Thursday.

Q Do you have a time for that? Is that 11:30?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact time. 11:30 sounds about right. It is available for full coverage.

I ought to point out that I think the follow-up questions have been turning into two separate questions on two separate subjects sometimes. The point here is it doesn't really make any difference to the President, but it is not really fair to your colleagues to take the time when some other person might get in his question in order to ask two entirely different questions.

I think follow-ups were originally intended to press the President on the subject you asked about and didn't get a satisfactory answer to, and I think we should get back to that.

Q What happens if you don't get a satisfactory answer the second time around? (Laughter) You know, nine-tenths of the time you don't.

MR. NESSEN: I think probably you will have to wait until the next news conference on that one.

Q Are you going to brief after the President's announcement?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am briefing now.

I have one other thing.

I think you know that we keep a list of questions that don't get answered at the briefing, and we try to answer them that afternoon if we can, and I think we will make it a policy to maybe formalize this a little more.

Yesterday there were three leftover questions, as I got them. One had to do with the President's planning for cleaning up oil spillage. The legislation on this will go to Congress tomorrow, so you will be getting copies of the legislation and the letter of transmittal tomorrow.

Just to give you kind of a general view of what the legislation will be like, it is called the Comprehensive Oil Spill Liability Act.

It would, number one, establish a domestic fund to cover oil spill damages, and it would create a uniform, nationwide system of strict liability for oil spill damages and settlement of claims. It would also implement two international conventions dealing with oil pollution caused by tankers on the high seas.

This legislation grew out of a meeting the President had last November with Governors from coastal States, and the President told them then that he would propose and work for such legislation dealing with oil spill liabilities.

Q How large will this fund be?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, Ralph, that is all the detail I can give you.

Q It is a Federal fund?

MR. NESSEN: It will be a national fund, that is correct.

Q Where do the funds come from for the fund?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather wait for the legislation --

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Q Where do the funds come from if they are matching?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not give any further details today since it is not fair to Congress.

Q Will it require an appropriation?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not explain the fund at the moment, John.

The second leftover question was whether Senators Baker and Buckley were coming in to talk to the President. At the moment, there are no plans for a meeting with them, but if they wanted to see the President they are welcome.

The third question was: Is the White House withholding a CIA file on Chile from the Senate committee headed by Senator Church? That file was sent over about a week or two weeks ago.

Q There was another leftover question about Senator Fulbright. Was the President aware ---

MR. NESSEN: I thought I answered that yesterday. The answer is yes, the President was aware Senator Fulbright had not gone to Israel.

Q A question went into your office yesterday afternoon about White House reaction to the Finn's statement that they will not be able to host the European Security Council since they did not get the answer by now; that is, it could not be the 28th.

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Do you have an announcement now that it will not be July?

MR. NESSEN: As the Finns stated publicly, they can no longer have the meeting on the 28th of July. Now other than that, the situation remains unchanged. There are some few issues remaining to be resolved and no decision has been made on the timing of a conference.

Q Did Dobrynin come in to see Dr. Kissinger today?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen Ambassador Dobrynin.

Q Or the President?

MR. NESSEN: He has not seen the President, I can say that. I do not know whether he has seen Henry, but I have not seen him in the building.

Q Ron, in view of the overwhelming support of the House for the Snyder amendment, does the President feel the Bunker negotiation should continue?

MR. NESSEN: The Bunker negotiations are continuing. They have been through about three administrations and they are continuing.

Q I know, but does the President feel that the Snyder amendment passage by an overwhelming majority of the House shouldn't be taken into consideration, or do you know what the Snyder amendment is?

MR. NESSEN: The Snyder amendment, for those who don't know what it is, is an amendment passed by the House to an appropriations bill which prohibits the expenditure of funds for a treaty which would surrender or modify American rights in the Panama Canal. Is that the same Snyder amendment you are thinking of, Les?

Q The very same.

MR. NESSEN: The answer to that is that ---
(Laughter)

Q We thought you meant another one. Could you give us a rundown on the other one?

Q About the President's viewpoint, what does he feel, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The President would not negotiate any treaty with Panama or anybody else which relinquished basic American interests.

Q What does that mean? That doesn't have anything to do with the current negotiations, does it?

MR. NESSEN: The current negotiations are going forward. They have been, as I say, for three administrations.

Q Ron, three of the top officials of the election committee are from the Defense Department and, because he is the Commander-in-Chief, will the President -- is he putting any restrictions on donations from executives of defense contractor firms?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, as he will make clear in his statement and as I think Dean Burch made clear when he filed the papers, the campaign will be conducted strictly in conformance not only with the letter but the spirit of the applicable laws.

Q Ron, what time is the President going to meet with the heads of the regulatory agencies tomorrow, and will you have them out here afterwards for briefing?

MR. NESSEN: The exact plans for the regulatory agency meeting are not set yet and I may tell you it might slip to Thursday.

Q May I make a special pitch to have those people out to brief us?

MR. NESSEN: There is a plan, whether tomorrow or Thursday, to have fairly extensive press coverage, including people to talk afterwards.

Q Ron, the White House budget is on the Floor tomorrow in the House. This is the one to operate the White House budget?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Congressman Udall has just said he recommends the President cut his staff in half, that it has escalated to the point where it has gone beyond reasonable bounds, including hiring a cheaper press secretary? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Did he say that or was that your idea?

Q He was the one that said that. He said you were worth -- not you, but the press secretary's job was worth about \$36,000 a year instead of \$42,500. Is there any feeling right now to have fewer people?

MR. NESSEN: I think Don said, when he announced the White House organization, and the President, I think, has spoken of it since, that the White House staff is being reduced. I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but there are goals for getting it down by a certain date. I don't have the dates and numbers before me.

Q The figures are that most of the cuts will come in low grade GS numbers and you are actually asking for doubling the high-priced people, the high grades down to or up to level 2, which is just below the cabinet level. Is there any feeling of why you have -- right now you have 54, you are asking for 95?

MR. NESSEN: I am not an expert on the White House budget but I can either look up the information or have somebody come out and talk to you.

Q The goal is not a secret, I take it?

MR. NESSEN: It is not. I just don't have the figures in front of me.

Q Ron, how many communications people and press people are there under you?

MR. NESSEN: It was something like 58 when I came here. It is down to 45. It is probably going to 40 people during this timetable set.

Q Do you really feel you need 40 people?

MR. NESSEN: I really wish I had more.

Q This office in EOB -- the communications office Klein had and Warren had -- that was strictly or largely political, wasn't it?

MR. NESSEN: No. There is no political activity.

Q The main thing they do is send out copies of the President's speeches to editors?

MR. NESSEN: No, there is no political job that that office does at all, and I have made that repeatedly clear to both Jerry and Margita that it is not to have any political use.

What it does, basically, is arrange for briefings for specialty writers, editorial writers and columnists. They have arranged some of these meetings that the President has had with editors and publishers and broadcast executives, and they prepare the morning news summary and the President's briefing books. But it has no political part to it.

Q If I could follow that, it is forbidden from following the practice in the 1972 campaign of organizing and participating in the surrogate speaking campaign, if you are acquainted with that, if you remember?

MR. NESSEN: I am.

Q That means they will not be doing that?

MR. NESSEN: People from the communications office?

Q The communications staff, a large part of their function in 1972 was to run the surrogate's campaign. You have said they can't do that.

MR. NESSEN: The law says they can't do that. I am sure you are familiar with the law that says there can be no overt political action on behalf of the President on Government time in the White House.

Q Ron, can you tell us if Phil Areeda is still on the payroll as a consultant? I know he has left the White House but is he still on the payroll as a consultant?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to find that out. I don't know.

In answer to a question over here, Secretary Kissinger will meet with Ambassador Dobrynin today. As I mentioned the last time somebody saw him here, he comes fairly regularly to talk to Dr. Kissinger or General Scowcroft.

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Q Ron, the Republican National Committee has been very scrupulous in paying for Air Force One when the President is campaigning.

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. I have to correct you there. The Republican National Committee paid for the trips last fall when the President was in his capacity as leader of the Republican Party.

The RNC also paid the cost of last week's trip to Cleveland and Cincinnati in full because again the President was there to raise money, on the one stop, anyhow, for the Republican Party, and not as a candidate.

Q On that same line of reasoning, I am wondering if it is possible the Republican National Committee might pay, when he is campaigning as distinct -- would therefore provide a salary, either part of your salary or another Press Secretary for campaigning.

MR. NESSEN: Let me come to that in a minute.

The pool that is going to see the President's statement should go with Bill Roberts now.

Let me answer Les' question. My salary will continue to be paid by the White House. I don't know what the plans are of the President Ford Committee, but I assume they will hire a press officer of some kind.

Q He was asking about the Republican National Committee. They can't do that, can they?

MR. NESSEN: Under the law the Republican National Committee cannot pay any of a candidate's expenses until he is the nominee of that party.

Q Wasn't that always true?

MR. NESSEN: Under the new law, certainly, John, it is.

Q You said no political activity by anyone on the White House staff. Is that a new law or the old one that you are citing?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure what specific law it is, but we have all been reminded of it.

Q You are not getting that one mixed up with the one about lobbying in Congress, are you?

MR. NESSEN: No, I know that one. Maybe it is an edict rather than a law, but we have all been reminded --

Q By who?

MR. NESSEN: In staff meetings.

Q Ron, who is paying for the trip this weekend?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, there are no political events this weekend.

Q When are you going to have the details on that trip, departure time and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: This afternoon or tomorrow morning, I am told, rough times.

Q Are you going to be accepting questions for candidate Ford?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean today?

Q I mean after noon today.

MR. NESSEN: No, I won't.

Q You will not?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Where do we direct those questions?

MR. NESSEN: To the President Ford Committee.

Q Ron, in view of the fact this is not going to be a political trip this weekend and the expenses will not be paid by the Republican Party of any campaign people, will the President rule out questions at the press conference on his campaign?

MR. NESSEN: If you would like him to, I am sure he would be happy to.

Q That is up to him to decide.

MR. NESSEN: I will ask him if he would like to rule out political questions.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:55 A.M. EDT)