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NEWS CONFERENCE

#415

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:30 A.M. EST

JANUARY 14, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: You know Henry has a news conference at noon, which we are going to pipe in here for you, so maybe we can wrap this up by noon. I think we should be able to.

You have the exchange of letters between the President and John Dunlop. You have seen the President announce Anne Armstrong and heard their remarks. You have seen the schedule for today. I, really, don't have anything.

Q Thank you. (Laughter)

Q Who will be the new Secretary of Labor,
Ron?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have one to announce today.

Q When will you announce that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have an exact timetable.

Q You are not denying the general word is it will be Mr. Usery, are you?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to announce on it today, Jim.

Q Ron, can you say whether the President has been talking with Usery in the last 24 or 48 hours?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go into that today.

Q When is the effective date of resignation,
Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I am told in order to make an orderly transition and have -- let me say that John Dunlop is having a news conference, or maybe has had it, and he may have gone into that. My understanding is for an orderly transition and so forth he will stay on the job until his successor is confirmed. February 1, I believe, is the target date for the transition to take place.

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Q Ron, at his news conference today, Mr. Dunlop said that yesterday, as on previous occasions -- those are his exact words -- the President tried to persuade him to remain on. Can you tell us on what previous occasions the President urged Mr. Dunlop to remain on?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any meeting or phone conversation, for that matter, that the President has had directly with John Dunlop other than the New Year's Day phone call of New Year's greetings, and the meeting they did have, the private meeting following the session at which the President decided to veto the common situs, or on the day the President decided to veto the common situs.

Q On that day, did he urge Mr. Dunlop to stay on?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, at the time I didn't attend the meeting, so I don't know.

Q Ron, Dunlop said today that, after talking with various labor and management people -- this is a quote -- "It is my sober conclusion from these discussions that attitudes have been significantly affected and that the requisite communication, confidence and trust is no longer possible, at least with me, in the post of Secretary of Labor."

Do you have any comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: No. Let me say at the beginning, I think the President's letter is very self-explanatory, and John has had his news conference where he has given at some length his views. I, frankly, won't have anything further to say on this subject.

Q Ron, let me ask one thing about the process by which a successor will be picked. Can you comment on whether the President will talk with leaders of organized labor, or does he plan to solicit a lot of views before he names a successor?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to check on the process, Rus. I don't know which process he will follow.

Q Keeping in mind what you have just said, is there any feeling here about what effect this will have on the President's campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard any expressed.

Q You told us Monday there were no plans for the President to meet with Dr. Dunlop. I am wondering, when was this meeting they had yesterday scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: Yesterday afternoon.

Q Does the President plan to replace the nine labor members of his Labor-Management Advisory Board?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, the members have not officially resigned.

Q They have not?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding. Technically, they have not.

I think the reality of the situation, as I said the other day, is that some time will have to pass before that body can be restored.

Q Ron, yesterday at the briefing you told us, when you announced Secretary Morton was to become a Counsellor to the President, he would play only an incidental role in the campaign.

MR. NESSEN: Wait a second. I don't think that is right.

Q Excuse me. You said, if I remember correctly, that he would be here primarily to advise the President on matters of economic and domestic policy and that his role as liaison with the President Ford Committee and the Republican National Committee would be incidental. Is that not a fair paraphrase?

MR. NESSEN: I think that sounds about right.

Q That being the case, the word "incidental," was that the President's description or did you get that description of Mr. Morton's role from somebody else on the White House staff?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is an accurate description of his role.

Q Mr. Morton contradicted that considerably yesterday. He denied, in an answer to Phil Jones, that he would play just an incidental role.

MR. NESSEN: Are you sure he did?

Q I can play the tape for you, if you would like.

MR. NESSEN: I will save you the trouble and read you the transcript.

Q And in response to a second question, he --

MR. NESSEN: Let's do the first thing first. I think Phil said, would you describe your duties as incidental and so forth. Then he said what he was really going to do was pick up the political duties that are now being carried out by Cheney, Hartmann and other people.

Then he said, "I think these duties would be concentrated into one shop, which I am happy to do. I don't think they are incidental in the sense of their importance, but I don't think they are going to be overwhelming in the sense of their consumption of time on my part."

Q Would you please go on and read his response to the last question I asked, that one and the question? I think that flies in the face of the "incidental."

I asked him, if you will remember, "Realizing that you are not going to play a managerial role in the campaign, the fact you are going to be liaison with the Republican National Committee and the President Ford Committee, would you say that that means you will play a fairly significant role in the President's campaign?" He said, "Yes, I think that is a pretty fair way to characterize it." I think that is more than incidental.

Q Ron, you leave me with an impression, and I am not sure you want to, and maybe it is my interpretation only. You seem to be saying that the President never had urged Secretary of Labor Dunlop to stay on, which sounds somewhat uncharacteristic of Mr. Ford.

MR. NESSEN: Certainly he did publicly and repeatedly through me. The only contacts I am aware of, Bob, are the New Year's Day phone call and this meeting on the day that the decision on common situs picketing was made.

As I say, I was not in that meeting, so I don't know what the conversation was. I don't think the President ever left any doubt that he did want John to stay. I think the letter says so.

Q Yes, but I just can't imagine that Mr. Ford, if he really wanted the Secretary of Labor to stay on, did not at some point pick up the phone and call him and say, you know, "Look, is it true you are thinking about leaving and, gee, I hope you won't do that." You have never denied or confirmed that, and I would like it straightened out for the record as to just how much effort he made.

MR. NESSEN: I will have to get somebody to go through the phone log. I am not aware of any such conversation, but at the same time, I don't think any doubt was left either publicly or with Secretary Dunlop that the President wanted him to stay.

Q To make the record complete, going back to Phil's question, Phil Shabecoff asked the question at the very beginning, he referred to Secretary Dunlop saying that the President urged him to stay on as he had, I think, on several previous occasions, as he had on previous occasions.

Just to complete the record, were there other occasions unrelated to situs picketing when for one reason or another Secretary Dunlop spoke of resigning when the President tried to keep him on?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, will Jack Calkins be leaving the White House staff now that he is a candidate for Congress?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I think he has to. I will check. He has actually left to run for Congress from New York.

Q Is he being replaced or is Secretary Morton's descent on the scene in the nature of a replacement?

MR. NESSEN: No. As Rog said yesterday, if he is replacing anybody in terms of the broad range of areas he will advise the President in, it is Don Rumsfeld. Just by further elaboration, then I will come back to Calkins, Rog feels -- I think in response to Fran's question as to why does the President feel he needs a new domestic counsellor -- I talked to Rog a little bit about that and he made the point which I tried to make but don't think I made very clearly, that it is not so much getting a new adviser or feeling the need for a new adviser, but rather the same adviser because Rog has been on the Economic Policy Board, the Energy Resources Council and Domestic Council, and if he left Government, the President would lose that advice he currently gets from Rog, so it really is sort of a continuation of the same advice he is getting.

On the Calkins thing, Rog is not intended as a replacement for Jack. I will need to check with Hartmann, because that is his particular office, and find out what his plans are for replacing Jack.

Q Ron, yesterday after you said that Morton's political liaison duties would amount to only an incidental duty -- which is the term you used -- I went and looked up "incidental" and it says "nonessential, occurring merely by coincidence or happenstance." (Laughter)

Do you intend to leave us with the impression today that whatever political --

MR. NESSEN: Come on, let's be serious. We have 19 minutes before Henry starts.

Q That is serious, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. I gave the explanation, the accurate explanation, of Rog's duties here at the White House. As Peter pointed out yesterday, there was a good deal of skepticism, and I sensed I am not going to be able to, or Rog either, relieve the skepticism, but I have given you the White House view of what Rog's duties will be here, the President's views, and Rog's own views.

I don't want to -- and I don't think I can -- sort of argue you out of your view, but I have described to you precisely what the President feels Rog will be doing here and what Rog feels are his assignments.

Q Ron, the operative statement for the past three weeks was that the President has no indication that Mr. Dunlop intends to leave his job. Was yesterday's meeting the first indication the President had that Dunlop did intend to resign?

MR. NESSEN: No. I have said all along, Russ, that the President reads the papers and has seen associates of Secretary Dunlop quoted as saying he was considering, and so forth, so I think he was aware of those quotations.

Q And he never called up his Cabinet Secretary, his Cabinet member and Secretary of Labor, and said "Hey, what is this? Are you planning to leave or not?"

MR. NESSEN: As I said before, I am not aware of any contacts. I can check the phone logs. But, at the same time, there was never any doubt in John's mind that the President wanted him to stay.

Q Ron, I was wondering, has the President had any comment on the \$90 billion proposal of Governor Reagan that Reagan says has been misinterpreted?

MR. NESSEN: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:45 A.M. EST)