

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#442

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:42 A.M. EST

FEBRUARY 23, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: You know the President made his speech over at the Governors' Conference today.

Also, the President is sending to Congress today his message on financial assistance for the Community Services Act. That would give \$2.5 billion a year to the States in block grants. The overall purpose is to provide the States with greater flexibility in delivering social services to low income families and to eliminate undue Federal regulation and restrictions. I think you have the message and you have the fact sheets.

Just to run through the schedule quickly today, at noon Ambassador-designate Anderson, who will be leaving shortly for Morocco, will come in to see the President to discuss relations with Morocco.

At 2:00 the President will see Governor Evans of Washington. The Governor is here for the Governors' Conference and asked for a chance to talk to the President about some specific questions and problems he has.

At 2:30 the President will see Peter B. Bensinger, who is being sworn in this morning -- right about now, as a matter of fact -- as the new Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration. The President wanted Mr. Bensinger to come in on his first day on the job so the President could discuss with him his concern about the drug abuse problem and about concentrating Federal efforts on the traffickers in hard drugs, and to tell Mr. Bensinger that he has the President's full support in this and that the President expects him to get on with the job and launch a serious effort against the traffickers in hard drugs.

Q Who else was in the meeting, Ron?

MORE

#442

MR. NESSEN: Mrs. Bensinger will be there, and from the staff Cannon, and Parsons of the Domestic Council.

Q Ron, has the President ever stated, declared that he thinks that there should be an easing up of efforts to crack down on marijuana?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think he was asked that question a couple of times recently, perhaps New Hampshire -- I don't remember exactly the place -- but the intensification of the efforts against hard drugs did not, to his mind, indicate any lessening of the enforcement of the marijuana laws.

Q Does he include in this discussion on hard drugs the great amount of heroin coming in from Mexico-- and I think he is working on that--and will we get a transcript of what he says?

MR. NESSEN: In the meeting with Bensinger?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I will check. We may have a pool in there for all or part of that meeting.

Q Ron, the President also said, if my recollection is correct, in that University of New Hampshire appearance that he was against the decriminalization of marijuana until the scientists decided what the safety factor was. Subsequently, in the middle of the week, there was a report saying that marijuana was less harmful than cigarette smoking and alcohol. Has the President changed his view?

MR. NESSEN: No, he hasn't, and I think I know the report you are referring to, Jim. I am not sure that was the precise timing, but if I read the report that you are referring to correctly, it didn't say it was less of a health problem. It referred to smoking and alcohol as less of a social problem in terms of its effects on the economy and people's ability to go to work the next day and that kind of thing. It was not a medical report. It was a report on the social effects, if I am correct.

Q The President has not altered his views?

MR. NESSEN: No, he has not.

Q Ron, we don't have a transcript. Would you check to see if he emphasized the heroin coming in from Mexico?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Ron, the report you are referring to said it was virtually harmless -- medically, physically?

MR. NESSEN: I have to look it up. I don't recall it that way.

Q What would be the organization or in what way would the President -- this President or any President, I suppose -- get a definitive statement, a definitive scientific or medical statement? Who would it come from? Is there an organization that would do this, an organization whose verdict would be, in the President's mind, determining, and if there is such a group or organization, or agency, has the President issued instructions to them or set in motion a program that would give once and for all some kind of definitive finding on marijuana?

MR. NESSEN: I think there is a good deal of scientific work going on in that area, Jim. It is the kind of question that I don't think has been assigned to a specific scientific group, but there are a number of scientists and doctors and research organizations looking into that question.

Q I am just wondering since we always get, not only from this President but from previous Presidents, the statement that the President is waiting for the scientific evidence, precisely where this scientific evidence is supposed to come from, who it is supposed to come from, and what basis we have for believing it is ever going to come, if there is no specific directive from the White House to a specific agency. Now, let's get a definitive ruling on this.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, that is something being conducted by a number of groups, and the very fact they have not agreed is what I think the President has pointed out on a number of occasions.

Q It is actually not so much a matter of a scientific or medical determination that the White House really wants as it is the White House waiting until the political time and climate is right. Isn't this a political decision on a scientific decision?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q It is not?

MR. NESSEN: No

Q It is not?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not a political decision.

Q Then what is the mechanism you have set in motion to get the scientific finding that you say you want?

MR. NESSEN: I have answered three times, Jim, that it is being conducted by various doctors, universities and laboratories. I don't know what else I can say.

At 2:45 the President is meeting with Governor Longley of Maine. Governor Longley is also in town for the Governors' Conference and also asked for an opportunity to meet the President to discuss some problems involving State-Federal relationships that he wants to discuss.

Q Ron, could we have a readout on Governor Longley's meeting? We have some questions from our dear people up in Maine about that.

MR. NESSEN: I will see if I can have Governor Longley outside for you.

MORE

Q Is this about tanks?

MR. NESSEN: I think one of the matters the Governor wants to talk about is that contract that a Maine firm has bid on, I believe it is for guns to go on a tank.

Q Is that the Merrimont?

MR. NESSEN: That is the name of the company, yes.

Q Could I ask a question on Jim's question? Is the President waiting for unanimity in the medical community before he changes or reconsiders his position on marijuana?

MR. NESSEN: If I read his remarks and understand his views correctly, he wants at least more unanimity than there is now.

Q Ron, the Surgeon General --

MR. NESSEN: Jim, we are beating a dead horse to death. You know there is nothing on the marijuana subject today, so let's go on with the events of the day. We could spend 45 minutes here and nothing is going to happen. Let's move on.

Q Ron, I would like to ask if he could ask the question?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, we have had a request for your question.

Q My question is simply that the Surgeon General quite some time ago in a definitive statement said cigarette smoking was harmful to health. What is the President's position on cigarette smoking since that was a definitive ruling?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you that, Jim. I don't have it.

Q Why are you giving up smoking cigarettes?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: At 8 o'clock tonight the President is going to give a dinner, as you know, for the Governors and their wives or husbands.

Is Sheila Weidenfeld handling the social arrangements for this, the coverage arrangements?

We can provide you with the various coverage plans.

Q Will we have an advance on the President's toast?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so, no.

Let me tell you about some weekend plans coming up, if you will. The President will leave early on Saturday to go to Florida. He is going to go first to Miami. Then he will go to West Palm Beach and from there go by motorcade down to Fort Lauderdale. That is next Saturday.

In the evening on Saturday the President will go to Sarasota where he will stay overnight. There is some problem getting enough accommodations in Sarasota to take care of all of the press corps but we are working on it.

On Sunday afternoon the President will leave Sarasota and go to Tampa, and then he will come back to the White House on Sunday evening.

Now obviously there are a lot of blanks to fill in on this schedule and I will take care of that as the week goes on.

Q Are those all the cities he is apt to hit?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. There probably will not be any cities added to the schedule but the specific events in the cities.

Q This is to further his political efforts in the Florida primary?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Will this be his last trip to Florida before the primary?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans beyond this trip but we are not making --

Q Ron, is he going to have a lot of public appearances, motor parades and that sort of thing, or is it a relatively quiet trip?

MR. NESSEN: There is one motorcade from West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale. The details of the rest of the trip I just don't have yet.

Q How long is that motorcade?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in miles?

Q Or hours?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact details yet, Fran.

Q You stopped in kind of mid-sentence a minute ago, Ron. You are not closing the door on the possibility he will go back to Florida on the following weekend?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans right now that I know of to go back after this trip.

Q Is it a possibility he might go back?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans to go back.

Q Are there any plans to go somewhere else the weekend after that?

MR. NESSEN: None that have been firmly made yet.

Q Will Mrs. Ford join him Saturday and Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dick. I didn't have a chance to ask.

Q She will be in Miami Friday night.

MR. NESSEN: That is right. She is going down there this weekend. If she is down there, she will hook up with him on Saturday.

Q Is a third Florida trip under consideration?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Early Saturday morning -- are you speaking of his arrival time for a breakfast meeting or breakfast speech?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have the departure time yet. But, actually, I think I know enough about the first day's schedule to know that a breakfast meeting is not part of it, John.

Q Ron, the first appearance will probably be mid-morning?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact times yet.

I don't have any further announcements.

Q Ron, can you give us a feeling on the Florida trip, where he will be going and the places?

MORE

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that yet, other than the motorcade that I know for sure.

Q Mr. Reagan has repeatedly mentioned among his differences with the President the Panama Canal issue, which is a rather hot issue, as I think you know, in Florida. I would like to ask, in view of the current negotiations, is the President concerned about the deportation and the closing down of the Panamanian business executives with troops and the accusation by the Panamanian Ambassador the way he views it, as strangulation, colonialism, oppression and blackmail? Is the President aware of this?

MR. NESSEN: That is the first I have heard of it, Les. I will have to look it up for you.

Q None of these things he is aware of?

MR. NESSEN: I say I am not aware of them.

Q Will it be possible for you to check and find out what is the reaction to these various things going on in Panama, and the accusations?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The President's reaction to Richard Nixon's statement in Peking about the naivete of signing agreements, et cetera?

Q Question, please.

MR. NESSEN: Dick is asking, I believe, for the reaction to a toast former President Nixon made in Peking.

We have looked at the entire toast and we do not interpret it as being critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Q Including Helsinki, right?

Q How did you get a copy of the toast or did somebody phone you from Peking and read it to you?

MR. NESSEN: No, these are published by the New Chinese News Agency and American press and so forth.

Q What does the White House think the former President did mean in that statement?

MR. NESSEN: We just don't interpret it as being critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Q When did you get a copy of the text?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely.

Q Did you get it before he delivered it?

MR. NESSEN: No, and my understanding is that he delivered it off the cuff.

Q Do you know if the President thinks now that Mr. Nixon is still a private citizen and nothing more there, and there is no more implication than that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any change to make in what we said before.

Q Do you have anything new to say about the possibility of a report from Mr. Nixon when he returns?

MR. NESSEN: As I have said from the very first day, there are no plans for the President to receive a report from former President Nixon. If he feels that he --

Q Who is he?

MR. NESSEN: If former President Nixon feels that he has anything significant to report, I would expect him to convey that to the State Department.

Q Ron, does the White House subscribe to the theory that Mr. Nixon has injected himself into the campaign to cause confusion and to increase the possibility John Connally will wind up the nominee?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will attempt to answer that question.

Q Ron, do you know why Madame Chou apparently said Chou En-lai was familiar with the former President's travel plans as early as early January before his death?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q And the President had no knowledge of it, he says, until about a month later?

MR. NESSEN: I have no explanation for that.

Q Ron, the President has had a series of telephone conversations and a personal meeting with Mr. Nixon since he pardoned him. Is it inconceivable that the President might talk by telephone with Mr. Nixon about his China trip?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for either a visit or a call.

Q Is it U.S. policy or does the President believe it would be naive for anyone to accept the Helsinki Accords at face value for relieving tensions?

MR. NESSEN: I don't get the drift of your question, Tom.

Q The question is, as I read it, former President Nixon says it would be naive to think that those accords will actually lead, in themselves, to a relaxation of tensions without following up in other steps. You say you don't see this as criticism of Mr. Ford's policy?

MR. NESSEN: I say we don't interpret this as being critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Q Does that mean you embrace the policy statement by Mr. Nixon, that it would be naive to believe the Helsinki Accords will stand on their own?

MR. NESSEN: I will stick to what I said about the toast.

Q Ron, there is no possible chance that the President would fail to talk to Mr. Nixon to get what information he may have, is there, in view of the fact that Mr. Nixon would have made the acquaintanceship and gotten the chance to talk with this new leader over there when the rest of the Administration has not?

MR. NESSEN: There is no plan for a visit or call to the former President. If he feels he found out something he thinks is significant, then I would expect him to pass that on to the State Department.

Q Then if he calls the White House and wants to talk to the President, would he get a chance to?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will get into speculative questions.

Q Has the President discussed the subject of former President Nixon's trip in the last two or three days with Secretary Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, is the President, or anyone at the White House, or State Department, receiving reports from former President Nixon during this trip?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q And has he telephoned the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Is anyone receiving reports from the Liaison Office in Peking about the activities of Mr. Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that, Ann.

Q Is there any sense in which the Administration is concerned about the former President's trip as an embarrassment?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will take that question, Jim.

Q Ron, do the formal statements by any former President of the United States made in a foreign country have any prior clearance with the Ford Administration, or are they considered to reflect general American foreign policy, or American policy? Do the statements of a former President have no bearing on current Administration policy?

MR. NESSEN: That is a very broad question and I don't see any need to answer it.

Q In response to Tom DeFrank's question at the President's last news conference in the East Room, Tom asked, "I would like to ask" -- this is, of course, to the President -- "if you really think it is wholesome and healthy for the conduct of American foreign policy for Mr. Nixon to be making this trip?" President Ford responded: "He is not going there involving any foreign policy matters."

Is that still the President's position, that Mr. Nixon is not going there involving any foreign policy matters?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q To your knowledge, has Nixon sought any guidance from anyone in the Administration on how he should conduct himself in China?

MR. NESSEN: He has not that I know of.

Q Over the weekend it was reported that the State Department has evidently given the go-ahead to Gulf Oil to conduct direct negotiations with the MPLA in Angola regarding their oil concessions in Cabinda. I wonder, first of all, did this approval from the State Department come to the attention of the President first for his okay?

MR. NESSEN: Let me say two things: One, there are no plans to extend diplomatic recognition to the MPLA organization in Angola, and especially the President has strong personal views about not doing that as long as 12,000 Cuban troops are in Angola.

Q I wasn't asking that.

MR. NESSEN: I know but I wanted you to understand.

The second part of the question, or the question involving Gulf, I understand the report you are referring to was an incorrect report, that the matter--that Gulf is in discussion with the State Department, but no such approval has been given and the State Department has full details of what the situation actually is and will help you if you will call them.

Q Ron, is it still your plan not to issue any statement tomorrow night? Is the President issuing a statement after there is a conclusive result in New Hampshire?

MR. NESSEN: I want to talk to the President about that and I haven't had a chance to do it yet. Perhaps tomorrow morning I could give you a little better idea of what, if any, activities will be around here tomorrow night.

MORE

#442

Q If Gulf does go in there, are we going to be prepared, if facilities or property is seized by the Soviets? Will we go in there and try to get it back for Gulf?

MR. NESSEN: This is being discussed by Gulf, and the State Department, and you should check with them about where it stands.

Q Two questions. Are we going to get a transcript of the Globe Interview?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, you may. If you would like it, ask for it.

Q I have been asking for it.

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: Fran wanted to know about the transcript of a Boston Globe interview. Whether we have them run off yet or not, I don't know. If they are, you can have them.

Q The second question is, tonight is the start of a series of public interviews with Presidential candidates sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Is the President going to participate in any of them as a Presidential candidate?

MR. NESSEN: On the President's behalf, I wrote back and told Jim Carrion, who is the producer of those, I think -- I don't know his exact title -- saying the President would not be able to take part in the first one, which is tonight, as you say, in Boston, but we would get to him later as the President's schedule for the days on which the other four are being held is made firm.

Q Ron, is the White House concerned about the fact that apparently the Saudi Arabians have bought ARAMCO and the property of American oil companies there, and the fact we are depending more than ever on Saudi Arabia for oil? Isn't this going to mean we will have less and less chance of getting oil if they don't want us to have it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything about that specific case. This is the first time I have heard anything about it. It is just a further argument for what the President has been trying to say for over a year, which is we need to remove our dependence on foreign oil producers, whoever they may be, and be independent in producing our own energy. That is why he sent his energy bill to Congress and pushed for passage of it.

Q Ron, is there a possibility that Dr. Kissinger will meet with former President Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I think the proper place for Nixon to give any report he feels has any significance to it would be the State Department.

Q Dr. Kissinger, specifically?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know who would be the proper person over there.

Q Ron, could you give us some explanation or detail of why Vice President Rockefeller is making this trip next week in connection with foreign policy matters? Is this because the President is unable to go himself?

MR. NESSEN: Really, there is a specific reason for each of the stops, which I dug out last week. I wonder if I still have it here. Each of the stops involves a specific invitation for a specific event. I don't know what I did with my list of places. If you will stop around later, I will give you the reason for each stop.

Q Ron, were you aware of the offer of two Cabinet posts to Ronald Reagan at any time prior to Reagan's disclosure last week?

MR. NESSEN: I think we pretty much talked about that last week, Les.

Q Could you tell me, were you aware of it before Reagan disclosed it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think the state of my knowledge is important to the issue.

Q I am fascinated with the state of your knowledge. Could you possibly answer the question?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, this morning the President spoke about unrealistic suggestions made in the heat of the election year, and I wonder if he had Reagan in mind?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to look at the context of that, John. I forget where that came in the speech, and I would like to see what went around it.

Q Could I ask another question on Kissinger? I accept the White House position that Nixon is not going there involving any foreign policy matters, but I would like to ask under those circumstances what business does the Secretary of State have announcing foreign policy down there that Mr. Nixon would probably report back to the Administration, being the State Department, if indeed that was the case. You know the White House is saying one thing and it would seem Henry is saying something entirely different.

MR. NESSEN: As always, I try to give you the most accurate version of the President's views. I think I have.

Q Ron, is President Nixon traveling with a green passport like all the rest of us private citizens, or is he carrying a diplomatic passport?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea. You will have to ask the State Department.

Q Last weekend in New Hampshire Ronald Reagan put a number on his expectation for the primary of 52-48. Does the President share that?

MR. NESSEN: No, the President has simply said that he expects to win.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:09 P.M. EST)