

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#443

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:33 P.M. EST

FEBRUARY 24, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The reason I am late is, I think some of you know, the Hearst publishers and editors are in town for their quarterly meeting, and they asked to come in and see the President this morning, and he did see them, for an hour.

Q When will we get the transcripts?

MR. NESSEN: The transcript will be available for anyone that wants it after they have had a chance to publish it in their p.m. papers tomorrow, so let's say sometime tomorrow afternoon it will be available.

Also available is General Scowcroft, for those photographers and cameramen who have put in a number of requests for photographs of General Scowcroft. If you would like to take pictures of General Scowcroft, he will be in his office at 6:00 this evening. This is in response to a long list of photo requests that have piled up.

Q Will he answer questions, too?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think it is just a photo opportunity.

Q Will there be a pool?

MR. NESSEN: No, just for photos.

You have received, I believe, the Legacy of Parks report.

This morning, as you know, the President met with the President of the Commission of European Communities, Mr. Ortoli. They discussed a number of issues of interest to both the United States and the European Community. The other members who attended the meeting are President Ortoli's colleague, Mr. Margerie, also the head of the European Community delegation in Washington, Fernand Spaak, and on the American side, General Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Ingersoll.

MORE

#443

Q Was Mr. Seidman there?

MR. NESSEN: He was not.

Q Yes, he was. He was sitting on the couch.

MR. NESSEN: He is not on the list of official participants.

Can we check that?

The President welcomed the opportunity to review economic developments in the United States and Europe since the last time they had an opportunity to meet, which was in Brussels in May.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction that the economic picture has improved in both the United States and in Europe, and especially by the recovery in the United States. They discussed measures that are being taken to promote full economic recovery among the industrialized democracies following the recession of 1974 and 1975.

There was also discussion of bilateral trade issues between the United States and the European Community, and the President reaffirmed his longstanding position in favor of liberalized trade within the laws of the United States and within the requirements of America's own domestic industries.

There were a number of international issues discussed.

You are right, Bill Seidman was present.

The President discussed with his visitor, as I said, some international issues, including the European Community's attention to development in Southern Europe, and the two Presidents agreed that relations between the United States and the European Community are very good.

Q Are you talking about the progress being made by the Communist Party in Italy to make political gains, is that what that refers to?

MR. NESSEN: Development in Southern Europe, I would think would include Italy.

Q Is the development specifically referring to Communist political progress?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I would get that specific, Mort.

Q What does it mean? Is it economic or political?

MR. NESSEN: I think both economic and political developments in Southern Europe.

Q You were present during the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I was not present during any of the meeting.

Q Does Southern Europe include Spain?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q San Morino? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: And they discussed general relations between the United States and the European Community, and the United States reaffirmed its support for a vigorous and strong relationship between the United States and the European Community.

You know that at 2:00 there is a presentation of diplomatic credentials involving the Ambassadors of Denmark, Switzerland and Japan. We will handle that in the normal way.

The American Ambassador to Mozambique -- actually I believe the first American Ambassador to Mozambique -- is making a call on the President this afternoon at 2:30 before taking off for his new assignment. They will discuss the relations with this new African country, and the Ambassador's new post there.

Q Who is that?

MR. NESSEN: The Ambassador's name is Willard A. DeFree.

At 4:15 this afternoon the Boy Scouts of America are coming to present to the President a copy of their 1976 report to the Nation.

Q What is the substance of this report, Ron? Do we have any advance on this at all? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Large parts of it are classified, and I am not able to give you anything on that. (Laughter)

Tonight, I know you are all anxious to hear about. Mrs. Ford will be in Florida tonight, so the President plans to have dinner with Susan and then to watch television of the election returns in the Residence with Susan.

The PFC, I am told, will be open, and that both Bo Callaway and Rog Morton will be over there and available to talk to anybody who wants to talk to them about the election results.

Most of the people in the White House will be going home at their normal time. I will be here, and one or two other people in the Press Office, to answer phones and answer queries. I do not expect anything out of the White House from the President tonight.

Q How about a statement from yourself, a statement from the Press Office?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, I don't really expect anything out of the White House.

Q But you will be on hand?

MR. NESSEN: I will be here on hand.

Q Will there be a lid?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't even consider that question. I don't expect anything out of here, but I will be here.

Q Or a lid to a certain hour where we might check back to see if you have any reaction?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, we could do that. We will have to figure out what the hour is.

Q What time do the polls close up there?

MR. NESSEN: The polls close at 8:00.

Q A lid until 9:00 or 10:00 then?

MR. NESSEN: A lid certainly until 10:00, yes, no question about that.

Q Did the President make any phone calls today to New Hampshire?

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not, that I know of.

Q To any political lieutenants at all?

MR. NESSEN: No, I mean Rog is here and I guess Bo is here, too.

Q What did he say about the early lead in the First Precinct?

MR. NESSEN: He hopes it continues as more returns come in.

Q Is the reason you are not planning anything from the President tonight is you suspect it to be too close?

MR. NESSEN: Not necessarily. I think mostly it is the feeling -- you have Bo and you have Rog over at the headquarters and you have Jimmy Cleveland and others up in New Hampshire, and the sort of immediate reaction ought to come from them and the President will sort of see what the returns look like and perhaps, you know, having something to say later.

Q I don't understand. Why should the immediate reaction come from them?

MR. NESSEN: They are the people running the campaign.

Q He is the candidate.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I know.

Q When would you expect the President to retire for the evening?

MR. NESSEN: I really don't know, Jim. I guess the TV specials are coming on at 11:30. I would think he would probably certainly wait up and watch those, but I don't know.

Q Ron, if the President wins in New Hampshire, isn't it likely he would want to talk to us tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that win or lose -- he expects to win -- is really the factor in whether he is going to speak tonight or have anything to say tonight.

Q What is the factor, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: As I told Phil in answer to the same question, Tom, the factor is these are the people who have run the campaign. They would have the sort of initial reaction to what this precinct means and that precinct means.

Q He is the candidate, and I think most other candidates will be speaking on the results of the campaign.

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, I don't expect anything.

Q Ron, are you following the old maxim good news is announced from the White House and bad news is lateralled off someplace else?

MR. NESSEN: No, Tom, I said he expects to win and whether he wins or loses is not a factor in whether he would have something to say tonight. It is not a factor.

Q Can you rule out the possibility he will watch returns, since Mrs. Ford is out of town? Can you rule out the fact he might watch returns with old friends, perhaps?

MR. NESSEN: I, at the moment, wouldn't rule it out, but I think he is only going to watch with Susan.

Q But, if he does, you will tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you the details about his evening.

Q Has the President gotten any reports from Morton today?

MR. NESSEN: Rog has told him about Dixville Notch, and that is all I know about.

Q When?

MR. NESSEN: At the senior staff meeting this morning.

Q Is the President concerned that too much emphasis is being placed on the outcome of this election as it relates to his campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I think you heard what he said up there.

Q That all the primaries are important.

MR. NESSEN: That is right, all primaries are important. He feels New Hampshire is important because he feels it will start him on the road to victory in the other primaries, and in Kansas City and the election.

Q Ron, what did the President say when Morton told him about Dixville Notch?

MR. NESSEN: He enjoyed the news.

Q Will Hartmann and Marsh and other senior advisers be here with the President tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know precisely which of the senior staff people are going to be here, but most of the White House offices will close at their regular times. As I say, Rog and Bo will be at the headquarters of the PFC, and I will be here, and I think perhaps Dick Cheney will be here, no question about that, but who else I don't know.

Q Do you rule out any possibility of the President going to his headquarters?

MR. NESSEN: I don't anticipate that.

Q Ron, will the President be seeing or talking to Secretary Kissinger tonight or tomorrow morning?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what time he gets back.

MRS. VANDERHYE: Quite late tomorrow morning.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the plans are for their first meeting after the trip.

Q Assuming the President doesn't say anything tonight, is there an opportunity for him to make some sort of reaction statement tomorrow, or will it be just a handout by you? How will the public ever get to know how the President feels about this before we see him campaigning in Florida this weekend?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will get his reaction to the outcome.

Q A news conference?

MR. NESSEN: No, no newsconference is scheduled for this week.

Q By what means?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have the means yet, Walt.

Q Do you think there is a possibility he will say something tonight?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, I don't expect him to.

Q Suppose he wins by a landslide.

MR. NESSEN: Or loses by a landslide. (Laughter)

Q On what does he base his optimism?

MR. NESSEN: As I told Phil, win or lose is not a factor in whether he will say something.

Q It is how you play the game? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It is how you play the game.

Q Can you tell us what is the factor?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, I don't expect him to say anything tonight.

Q But you are keeping your options open?

MR. NESSEN: I am not ruling it out.

Q You say win or lose is not the factor. Can you tell us what the factor is?

MR. NESSEN: You know, what time the results are final, what the other candidates are saying, what his own people are saying, those kinds of things.

Q Could we have a pool to observe the President observing the returns?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't check that with him, but let me check it.

Q Yesterday you said you would check and find out what the President's reactions are to the latest developments in Panama, which I gather Dr. Kissinger has been discussing.

MR. NESSEN: You ticked off a number of events in Panama which I did check into and found they all involved Panamanian politics, and it is something we would not normally comment on, on the internal political events in another country.

Q How about the accusation leveled toward the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Which one?

Q Where the Ambassador made several charges running from blackmail on?

MR. NESSEN: The Panamanian Ambassador?

Q That is right.

MR. NESSEN: To the United States?

Q To the Organization of American --

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen that.

Q I gave a photostatic copy to the office yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: It never reached me. I didn't see it.

Q I have it right here.

MR. NESSEN: Phil?

Q Has Mr. Ford had an opportunity to observe any of the television coverage of Nixon's trip while he is in China?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure whether he has or not, Phil. He doesn't normally watch TV because his schedule is such that he is still in the office when the nightly news comes on.

Q Has he received any report from our liaison there assessing the Nixon trip thus far?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any.

Q Ron, since Nixon broke off relations with the press, Rabbi Korff has served often times to reflect his views. Rabbi Korff is quoted on the wire services today as saying the State Department prompted and urged Nixon to go to China to get a late reading on the Chinese leadership since the change. That seems to contradict what the President said.

MR. NESSEN: The Administration was not involved in any way with the trip.

Q Do you think Korff is just mistaken?

Q Is that the whole statement?

MR. NESSEN: That is the whole statement.

Q No comment on Korff at all?

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you this Administration was not involved in any way in the trip.

Q Does that take in the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: It certainly takes in all the top officials of this Administration, whatever department they serve in, including the State Department.

Q Is the President following the discussions of private citizen Nixon with the Chinese leaders through press reports?

MR. NESSEN: He reads the paper, Phil. You know that.

Q Has he made any comment about those discussions?

MR. NESSEN: Only the ones I relayed to you yesterday concerning the toast, that full reading of the toast has led to the conclusion that we don't interpret it as being critical of U.S. foreign policy. That is what I said yesterday.

Q How does the President react to stories being written that the Nixon trip is an embarrassment to him? Do you think that is a correct reading of the President's feeling?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to gauge, it seems to me, what voters' reactions are.

Q Ron, the collateral question that grows out of that, Ron, you haven't been asked since I think the beginning of the New Hampshire primary, polls in New Hampshire -- and I believe elsewhere -- have shown that the President's pardon of Nixon is still an issue in the minds of many voters and it has been reraised in their minds by Nixon's visit to China.

Has the President had any further thoughts about his pardon? Has he had any change of views about his pardon and what does he think about the pardon as a political issue in the primary campaigns?

MR. NESSEN: I think he was asked that question in New Hampshire and gave his answer, and you will find it in the transcript.

Q What about the latter part? Does he think it is a political issue?

MR. NESSEN: Every poll I have seen indicates it is of perhaps interest to 2 or 3 percent of the people. I have not seen any polls showing much higher than that.

Q Ron, you say it is hard to gauge voters' reaction to the Nixon trip. Let me just ask you in this line of reasoning that you have been talking about, does the President think he should bring up the whole issue of the pardon and the interpretation of Nixon's comments at the toast the other night?

Then there is another view that says there may be a sympathy vote, some people may feel that Nixon is sort of twisting the blade in the President's back and New Hampshire voters will go the other way, there will be a backlash and the President will actually benefit.

Is that what you are talking about?

MR. NESSEN: I think you would have to interview every voter, John, and ask them why they cast their vote the way they did. I don't know of any way you can get inside people's heads and determine why they cast their vote a particular way.

Q Mr. Cleveland has said frequently he would just as soon President Nixon had not gone on this trip. He said so again on this morning's Today Show, that he would just as soon Nixon had not gone on the trip. Does the President concur with Cleveland's statement?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see Cleveland's statement. The White House has said all along it is a private citizen's trip without any encouragement from the White House and, in response to this latest Rabbi Korff thing, the Administration was not involved in any way with the trip.

Q This is a more direct question, maybe if you could, the next time you talk to the President, ask him if he agrees or disagrees with his State Chairman in New Hampshire who said he would just as soon the trip was not occurring right now.

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Ron, no matter what the circumstances of the trip are, certainly the Administration is interested in hearing or reading the record of Mr. Nixon's conversations with the Chinese leaders, correct?

MR. NESSEN: I said yesterday there are no plans for him to report to the President, that if he feels he has something that is significant, I would expect him to get in touch with the State Department and pass it on to somebody over there.

Q Are you saying there are no plans at the moment for Dr. Kissinger to see former President Nixon in California?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly none that I know of.

Q Ron, who would the President rather see, Richard Nixon or Alexander Solzhenitsyn?

MR. NESSEN: That wins the question of the day award.

Q How about an answer of the day, Ron? How would you speculate?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q You do know Kissinger saw Nixon on Monday before the Thursday announcement?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q You are saying that Kissinger did not give any encouragement for the trip at that time or anything else? Does the President have any kind of record of the conversation?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that Kissinger and Nixon talked about China in general terms, did not talk about a trip or -- well, let me back up. They did not talk about -- Dr. Kissinger did not get from the former President any idea that the trip was going to be coming at the time that it did.

Q I wonder why?

MR. NESSEN: You would have to ask Mr. Nixon.

Q There is no chance that Mr. Nixon might be appointed to some roving Ambassadorship, is there?

MR. NESSEN: None that I know of.

Q Ron, when you and the President say you expect him to win in New Hampshire, is that based on any late polls or private polls of the PFC or the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is based on a lot of things, in response to the phone banks, and what the President interprets to be the kind of reception he got when he was there, and the fact that the momentum has turned around really in the past two weeks.

Q Any polls?

MR. NESSEN: You know, I think we are just going to have a rule not to talk about the polls either good or bad.

Q We are not asking what they are. Are there polls?

MR. NESSEN: If there are any, they are taken by the PFC and I haven't seen them over here.

Q Do you have a comment on Soviet party leader Brezhnev's address to the Soviet Congress?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q Do you know what the Administration position is on military and economic aid to Israel during the transition quarter? A story in the Washington Post today has the House committee voting it down with Passman relaying the opinion of the President that he doesn't want it to go through.

MR. NESSEN: The position is this: The position is that the money requested by the Administration for the upcoming fiscal year, including the transition quarter, is adequate--not just for Israel but for all the Middle Eastern countries--is adequate for the four quarters plus the fifth, or transition quarter.

Now, if Congress wants to appropriate extra money for the transition quarter -- and apparently this vote in the House looks like they don't want to and, therefore, is in line with the President's position -- but if Congress wants to vote extra money for the transition quarter, the President would not object as long as the money was distributed proportionately among all the recipients of military aid and not just have transition funds for one country but not for all the other countries.

Q Is that a change of policy? I thought the position on the transition quarter across the board was it would make no change in policy and it would maintain all spending at levels that would be essentially neutral; that is, essentially no change of policy.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the President's first position is that what he recommended is adequate for the fourth quarter plus a fifth transition quarter. If Congress doesn't agree with that and wants to add money for the transition quarter, the President wouldn't object as long as it was to all countries getting military aid. The first position is he doesn't believe there is any need for money for the transition quarter.

Q Nevertheless, he has modified his policy of not opposing increases in the transition quarter?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is a modification. The last time this was publicly discussed, the issue was being looked at, and this is the conclusion from the period of study.

Q Ron, can you tell us how the President and his campaign committee view Mrs. Ford's trip this week?

MR. NESSEN: Do you mean in terms of who pays for it?

Q No, in terms of its purposes and the reasons for her going.

MR. NESSEN: You would have to check with Sheila on that.

Q You have no view and the President has no view on it?

MR. NESSEN: I know she is going to Florida, but I don't know what the events are or anything, Fran.

Q Do you know what the taxpayer is paying for Nixon's trip?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it is practically nothing.

Q Secret Service?

MR. NESSEN: As I understand it, there are three people traveling with the former President; namely, Jack Brennan, a male secretary and a corpsman. The President pays their salary out of his own appropriation, approved by Congress.

The Chinese Government, I understand, pays the travel expenses and the expenses in China, and that those three people on the staff of the former President, and paid by him out of his Congressional appropriation, do not get per diem because the Chinese are paying their expenses.

The Secret Service detail, I don't know what the size of it is or anything else. It is something that Congress has passed a law requiring Secret Service protection for former Presidents and their wives and, as I say, I don't know what the number is, what the salaries are, what their per diem is.

It is something you will have to get from the Secret Service. But, the only reason they are going along is that Congress requires them to protect former Presidents in the law. I see little if any expense to the Federal Government.

Q The Secret Service won't give any indication whatsoever of what kinds of protection is being afforded a former President? Don't you think the Government ought to be able to provide American taxpayers with some idea of how much money is being spent?

MR. NESSEN: It is something I don't have, Dick, never have had and it is something that ought to come out of the Secret Service, which is in the Treasury Department.

Q That is the only item the American people are paying for?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I can determine in looking this over, it is the only item that --

Q There was no Air Force pilot?

MR. NESSEN: When you say this is the only item, this is an item Congress has required be given to former Presidents.

Q I asked if that is the only item the American people are being hit with on this trip?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know. The appropriation to the former President is also a Congressional appropriation from which he is paying Jack Brennan, the secretary and the corpsman.

Q And no extra funds?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Can you tell us if this detail and the one when he is home in San Clemente are the same size?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how many are going. I don't know how many are out there when he is in San Clemente.

Q But they made an advance trip.

MR. NESSEN: As I said, these are matters required by Congress.

Q There was a pilot and navigator.

MR. NESSEN: That is a matter of some CAB or FAA regulation. You know, the same thing is done when foreign planes come into the country. They are not familiar with the airways here.

Q Ron, you said resolutely that the Administration did not in any way encourage this trip. We accept that. The question is, did the Administration have any chance to discourage it or did it just suddenly appear as it seemed to appear?

MR. NESSEN: It suddenly appeared.

Q With no advance notice?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Was the President pleased or displeased by this?

MR. NESSEN: Les, we have beaten this horse to death, it seems to me, for a week now. If you don't understand the Administration position by now, I don't think I can add much to it today.

Q Has former President Nixon given the President any reason to expect him -- that is, Nixon -- to travel to Japan in the near future?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of any such trip that the White House has been told of.

Q Speaking of Japan, the Japanese Parliament passed a resolution and Prime Minister Miki says he is also going to send a letter to the President requesting all information of the Lockheed bribes that the U.S. Government might have been supplied to the Japanese. Does the President have a reaction to this?

MR. NESSEN: I know about that chain of events. Any request has not arrived yet, as far as I know, had not as of this morning.

Q Do you have anything to say about it at this point?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that the State Department is discussing the entire question of Lockheed and alleged payoffs with the Justice Department and the SEC. As you know, both the SEC and the Justice Department are conducting an investigation of alleged bribes overseas. I think while the State Department is in the process of talking to Justice and to the SEC, I think it is not proper for me to say anything while those discussions are going on.

Q Ron, when the President was in New Hampshire, he said, I think for the first time, that Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace --

Q No, he didn't say it for the first time.

MR. NESSEN: I think he said it a lot of times at news conferences.

Q Is the White House now encouraging companies to do business with the new Government in Angola while, at the same time, not recognizing it?

MR. NESSEN: You are talking about the Gulf thing. I still don't know where that stands. It is something the State Department is dealing with. My understanding is that Gulf's dealing prior to and now are something that don't require any Government --

Q I thought you said yesterday that was an erroneous story. Are you treating it as an accurate story today?

MR. NESSEN: No, Jim, what I said was erroneous yesterday was a report I saw printed saying that the State Department had given approval to Gulf to go back into Angola. Yesterday I said that was not true.

To my understanding, it is not. Today I am saying in elaboration of that it is something you really ought to talk to the State Department about, but it is my understanding private American companies don't need Government approval to go back into business.

Q Wasn't Gulf discouraged from continuing its operation there by the Government?

MR. NESSEN: The whole thing was handled by State, and I don't want to get in over my head on this.

Q Do you have any comment on Boeing's dealings with the MPLA?

MR. NESSEN: I am told those airplanes are not being sold to the MPLA.

Q I believe a downpayment has been made and accepted by Boeing and the planes are finished and waiting on the runway to take off.

MR. NESSEN: That again is the State Department, but my understanding is they are not going to be delivered.

Q My question was, inasmuch as President Ford believes that Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace, have you ever heard him -- the President -- say anything about the wholesomeness or the wisdom of Mr. Nixon's trip to China?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, I think you know our views on the trip to China.

Q To be honest with you, the only view the President has stated is that Mr. Nixon is going as a private citizen, but the President has said that he resigned from office in disgrace. Does he have no other views on the Nixon trip other than this is a private visit?

The question is, is it wholesome for the United States to have this man who resigned in disgrace representing this country abroad?

MR. NESSEN: He does not represent the United States Government, as the President has said. He is not on any diplomatic mission. He doesn't have any diplomatic charge.

Q So, President Ford has no views on the Nixon trip other than the fact that this man went as a private citizen?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Ron, before we quit, could we go back to the question on Japan and Lockheed?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I am not sure, but I don't think you really answered this question.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't intend to answer the question. I did say that Justice and SEC are investigating the Lockheed matter and that State is in the process of consulting with them. We have not received a request yet from the Japanese.

While Justice and SEC are investigating and State is talking to them about it, I am just not going to say anything further.

Q So, you are not waiting for the end of the investigation per se to respond to the Japanese Government?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not going to say anything further today.

Q Ron, private citizen Nixon is traveling with a diplomatic passport, isn't he?

MR. NESSEN: You have to check State. I have no way of knowing.

Q He is.

Q Do you feel the press is exaggerating the importance of this Nixon trip?

MR. NESSEN: I never make those kinds of statements, Phil.

Q If he is just a private citizen, why does he have a diplomatic passport?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what kind of passport he has.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 1:09 P.M. EST)

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#444

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:19 P.M. EST

FEBRUARY 24, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I don't really have that much. I think it is obvious that the thing is a cliff-hanger. It is awfully damn close.

The President's feeling is that by the time all the votes are counted, he is going to win. He is confident he is going to win.

Q Does he agree with Stuart Spencer that all of this seems to be a conspiracy between Nixon and Connally?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I think that you know we are in the middle of the vote count, something like a third of the votes have been counted, and I think it is just too soon to really assess whether the Nixon trip had any effect at all on the election.

Q Earlier you said it certainly didn't help. Is that still a factor?

MR. NESSEN: No, I just think it is too soon to say what effect it has had, if any.

As I say, it is close, it is a cliff-hanger. The President thinks he is going to win. He thinks even having it this close shows he has gained considerable momentum in the past couple of weeks. As recently as two weeks ago, the polls showed he was quite far behind, perhaps 15 points behind, so he has had quite a bit of momentum and has really closed the gap here in the last two weeks.

Obviously, he is going right down to the wire, and when all the votes are in, he thinks he will have won.

Q Whose poll showed him 15 points behind?

MR. NESSEN: What poll was that? I forget which one it was, but anyhow, one of the polls.

MORE

#444

Q Was it one that the Ford people paid for?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was a public poll.

Q What is he basing this on?

MR. NESSEN: What?

Q His prediction?

MR. NESSEN: His confidence?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: He has been watching up in the study in the Residence on TV, and he has had some calls from Cheney, who is in his office, and Cheney has been talking to people in New Hampshire and over at the PFC.

Q Where is Cheney?

MR. NESSEN: In his office, and he has been calling the President, and Rog Morton, who is over at the PFC and is keeping in touch with people by phone has also been calling the President.

Q Morton left quite a while ago.

MR. NESSEN: Morton left here?

Q No, the committee.

MR. NESSEN: And went over to the PFC.

Q He left the PFC.

MR. NESSEN: Anyhow, the second point is if you look at the delegates' race, you see that the President is leading in a vast majority of the delegates races. The last thing I saw had the President leading in 17 out of the 21 races for delegates to the Republican Convention.

Q 17 out of 21?

MR. NESSEN: That was the last count I saw on the wires. He is grateful for that and gratified. That is what the whole thing is about, getting enough delegates to win the nomination in Kansas City. The President believes, with the delegates, he is going to win in New Hampshire and the delegates he is going to win elsewhere, when he gets to Kansas City, he will have a large and decisive majority.

Q You say he is confident that when he gets --

MR. NESSEN: That is right. When he arrives in Kansas City for the Convention he will have a large and decisive majority of delegates, including those he is winning tonight in New Hampshire.

Q This is based on seeing the President in the last show-up?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Who else has he talked to by phone besides Cheney and Morton?

MR. NESSEN: Cheney and Morton are basically the ones he has talked to.

Q Anybody else with him besides Susan?

MR. NESSEN: No, Susan has been in and out.

Q Is he alone, otherwise?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Has he talked to Mrs. Ford?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Getting back to the point Bob raised, I know you can't assess at this point what impact the Nixon trip may have on the outcome, but does the President believe that there was a conspiracy between Nixon and Connally in connection with this trip?

MR. NESSEN: I have never heard him talk about such a conspiracy, Russ.

Q Is he aware that Spencer said that?

MR. NESSEN: He is watching the TV and it has been on the TV.

Q Is he unhappy with Spencer saying that?

MR. NESSEN: I understand that Spencer has talked to several people at several points, and I am not sure Spencer said that. Spencer, it seemed to me, talked about the effect of the Nixon trip on the election. I didn't see Spencer quoted anywhere as saying that.

Q Where is the President watching?

MR. NESSEN: Up in the study. You know, up on the second floor.

Q You mean the one at the end of the hall?

Q You mean the Lincoln Sitting Room?

MR. NESSEN: No. You know there is the end of the hall, then the bedroom is behind that. It is the next room over.

Q Across from the dining room, you mean?

Q Over the Yellow Oval Room?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, that is right, over the Yellow Oval Room. You get off the elevator and walk straight across the hall, and it is a study. He has his exercise equipment and a lot of stuff he brought from his Alexandria home. It is right next to their bedroom.

Q He hasn't talked to Spencer tonight on the phone?

MR. NESSEN: The phone list doesn't show that he has.

Q Who else did he talk to?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Morton and Cheney are about the only two people he has talked to.

Q Has he seen, to your knowledge, any figure yet that -- the last I saw it was Reagan 51 percent. Do you know if that is about what he has seen? Has he seen anything that pushes him over the top?

MR. NESSEN: We haven't gotten anything that is substantially different from what the TV cameras are showing.

Q Does this mean he has some strong suburban strength coming in, some stuff that hasn't come in from areas he visited?

MR. NESSEN: The TV indicates that there is quite a bit of -- some of the larger towns in the Southern part of the State are yet to be counted.

Q Are you going to put on a lid now, Ron?

Q I hope not.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't plan to, Bob.

Q I want to hear the last of this whole --

Q Have the people in New Hampshire been telling Morton and Cheney where these votes are coming from?

MR. NESSEN: I talked to them myself up there a couple of times, Russ, and it is somewhat confused as to where the votes are coming from.

Q He has reason to believe areas of his greatest strength have yet to report?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Is he surprised by the voting? Is it turning out about the way he expected it, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: It started out to be a cliff-hanger, and considering he was so far behind two weeks ago, it shows he really has gained quite a lot in the last two weeks.

Q He saw a poll that said he was 15 points behind two weeks ago, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q He is in good spirits?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q We should anticipate hearing from you in what, about an hour?

MR. NESSEN: As soon as we get something here. I think I will watch the 11:30 shows.

END (AT 11:27 P.M. EST)