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

#447

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:00 NOON EST

FEBRUARY 26, 1976

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The energy message will be signed by the President this afternoon. We will have for you two fact sheets, one a short one and one a very complete one, plus a text of the message of the President. We are working away on that. We may have some of the material after this briefing.

Q Is there an embargo on that message?

MR. NESSEN: The embargo is 3:00. The President will sign it at 2:00 and then it will be taken up to Congress, and the embargo is to coincide with the delivery to Congress.

Q When will we be able to get it?

MR. NESSEN: Some of the pieces will be coming out after this briefing. They are working now to mimeograph it and so forth.

I think you know pretty much the schedule for today.

There is a reception this evening at 6:10 for the members of the Republican National Committee, who are having a meeting here in Washington, and we will obviously have the usual coverage by the writing pool that we do for receptions.

Q Is he going to make remarks?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is just a reception.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: He will talk to people individually, but he doesn't plan any formal remarks.

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Q Nothing for publication?

MR. NESSEN: No, but there will be a pool over there.

Q Is this an annual meeting of some sort?

MR. NESSEN: They are meeting from Wednesday through Saturday at the Sheraton Motor Hotel in Washington. Their last meeting was in September, so this looks like a semi-annual meeting.

Q Are receptions like this examples of what the President has to pay for?

MR. NESSEN: I will ask who does pay for it; obviously not the taxpayers. I will find out who pays for it.

Q How many are you expecting?

MR. NESSEN: There is a pretty long list.

Q Several hundred?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it looks like several hundred to me. We will get the exact number for you.

Tomorrow morning the President is going to have a breakfast here at the White House at 8:00 with the former chairmen of the Republican National Committee, or most of them. The following former chairmen are expected to attend that breakfast: Senator Dole, Bob Dole -- would you want the years they were chairmen of the party?

Q It would help.

MR. NESSEN: Bob Dole, 1971 to 1973; Rog Morton, who was chairman from 1969 to 1971; Dean Burch, 1964 to 1965; William Miller, 1961 to 1964.

Q Credit card Miller? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Who is so well known now they won't let him do the commercial anymore.

Mead Alcorn, 1957 to 1959; Len Hall, 1953 to 1957; Hugh Scott, 1948 to 1949; Herbert Brownell, Jr., 1944 to 1946; Mary Louise Smith, who is the current chairman of the RNC.

These people are in town in connection with the RNC meeting, and the President thought it would be a good idea for them to come to the White House.

Now, the missing folks are George Bush, for obvious reasons. He was the chairman in 1973 to 1974; Ray Bliss, who is ill, 1965 to 1969; Thruston Morton, also ill, 1959 to 1961; Guy Gabrielson, 1949 to 1952, who is quite an elderly gentleman now and not able to attend.

Q Is the President going to discuss his campaign with these people?

MR. NESSEN: I would be surprised if he didn't.

Q You would be surprised if he didn't?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Will he ask them for advice, do you mean, and that sort of thing?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that he will ask for advice.

Q Do you know how many of these people have endorsed the President?

MR. NESSEN: How many of this particular list?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I really don't, Bob.

Q Would you expect that they would be available or is there going to be a photo of this?

MR. NESSEN: Is there some interest in seeing them after the breakfast?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Let me see what I can work out.

Q Why did the President invite them?

MR. NESSEN: They are in town, and he felt like he would like to have them over to the White House.

Q Are you sure you don't know how many of these people support the President already?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q The committee is not allowed to endorse, though, is it, not yet?

MR. NESSEN: The RNC? No.

A few more details on the Florida trip. This motorcade on Saturday that I mentioned to you yesterday, which goes from Palm Beach down to Fort Lauderdale, it is not a motorcade in the sense that there is any intention of getting people to line the whole way -- (Laughter) Wait a minute, you will see how this all works out. Forewarned is forearmed.

What it will be is the President driving from location to location, and there are prescheduled arranged stops in 12 places. At the prearranged scheduled stops, the mayors will come out or other civic leaders, the high school band and so forth, so there will be an effort to raise a crowd at 12 specific places, but not every step of the motorcade.

Q Do you have the names of the 12 places?

MR. NESSEN: Not yet. I don't yet.

Q What will he do if it rains?

MR. NESSEN: I can't imagine it raining on a Saturday in Florida. (laughter)

Q No hurricanes either, right?

MR. NESSEN: Two-thirds of the motorcade will be along the coastal route, the so-called Dixie Highway, and then one-third of it the motorcade will go inland.

Q Are you sure about that designation as Dixie Highway? Isn't Route 1 Dixie Highway?

MR. NESSEN: Ralph Renick is here. He ought to know.

MR. RENICK: What was the question?

MR. NESSEN: The route from Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale, is that called Dixie Highway?

MR. RENICK: It is A-1-A.

MR. NESSEN: Is Route 1 Dixie?

MR. RENICK: Yes.

Q So two-thirds is on A-1-A?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding.

Q Ron, is there to be an effort to get people out to this Spanish park?

MR. NESSEN: That will be one of the locations, yes.

Q That might be the longest stop, if he is going to have a chance to answer --

MR. NESSEN: Thym wants me to tell you the 12:00 photo for the Easter Seal child, the pool for that should meet Thym by the door now.

Q Will you have phones at all the 12 stops for filing?

MR. NESSEN: Here is what we will do. I am just as concerned as you are about the filing. What I think we will do is we will have a filing place somewhere before Boca Raton and the people who need to file will be taken, after let's say five or six stops, taken over to this filing place, you file your story and then the President in a sense will wait at Boca Raton until you are finished filing and have caught up and are ready to go on with the rest of the motorcade.

Really, I think that will probably be the best way. There will also be a lot of phones at Boca Raton for filing. I am trying to stretch the Boca Raton stop as long as possible so you will also have filing time there.

Also, John Carlson is going down tonight to make the final arrangements and look out for everybody's best interest.

Q For those of us with early Sunday deadlines, what is your estimate of this filing stop, or this filing spot, before Boca Raton? What is your estimate of the time we will be there?

MR. NESSEN: The first drop-off point would be at 2:00, and there will be facilities there so you can drop off at 2:00 and then catch up.

Q Can we put in a request that it not be much later than 2:00?

MR. NESSEN: That is what we are working on, 2:00.

Q Do you have any estimate of what time he will arrive at Fort Lauderdale International Airport?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I do.

Q What time is it?

MR. NESSEN: If we stretch the Boca Raton stop to an hour instead of a half hour, it will put us into Fort Lauderdale later than we thought.

Q Is he going to stop and answer questions in a little news conference at Boca Raton?

MR. NESSEN: I think at that park he will be available to local folks who want to ask him things. Under the proclamation issued here yesterday --

Q Anybody on anything?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Those that peel off before Boca Raton to file, will they get to Boca Raton in time to take part in the press conference?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: That will be at 4:45 at Boca Raton.

Q How about Fort Lauderdale?

MR. NESSEN: 7:00 to 8:00 I think we are thinking about. There are so many imponderables, we are not sure what time we will get there now.

Q Do you have any idea what time we leave here and when we get there?

MR. NESSEN: Early.

Q Do you have a check-in time at Andrews Saturday morning?

MR. NESSEN: Not yet, but it will be early, around the 6:00 area.

Q When will we get back on Sunday?

MR. NESSEN: Not too late on Sunday, at least according to the schedule as made up now.

Actually, once everybody gets to Sarasota Saturday night, at the moment there is no scheduled event in Sarasota, so it should be an early night.

Q Will we stay in Sarasota?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, we have all that worked out. People will be spread around in a couple of hotels, but you will stay in the same city as the President and some in the same hotel as the President, but not in the same room.

Q He will stay in a hotel?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q What hotel?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know yet.

I don't have any other announcements.

Q Will there be a briefing on this energy message at all?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, Zarb is coming down right after the signing ceremony, somewhere around 2:15 or 2:30.

Q What strategy did the President decide on with his strategists?

MR. NESSEN: None that I know. He has his strategy.

Q How long did the meeting last?

MR. NESSEN: A little over an hour.

Q Can you give us any readout at all on that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: Because it is the President meeting with his political advisers to map strategy.

Q Ron, Time Magazine charges that the Ford Administration is making an effort to keep the Panama Canal negotiations low-key until after November. You have had a photostatic copy of Ambassador Pitty's strong denunciation of the United States for three days now. I am just wondering, is there any comment on this, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Is he the Panamanian Ambassador to the OAS who made critical comments about the United States?

Q . Yes.

MR. NESSEN: We think those comments were unsuitable.

Q You are not trying to keep it low-key until after the election?

MR. NESSEN: These negotiations have gone on since Lyndon Johnson; they continue to go on. You know what the President's position is in terms of what he is insisting on, and I don't have anything beyond that.

Q There is no effort to keep it low-key, is that what you are saying?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly none that I know of.

Q Can you tell us whether the President is going to withdraw the nomination of Mr. Hooper to the TVA?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he will. I believe Mr. Hooper has requested that his name be withdrawn following the action of the committee -- I believe they tabled it, did they not?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: He will be acceding to Mr. Hooper's request and will send forward another name. I don't have the name for you today.

Q Ron, can you say whatever became of the appointment of John Connally to PFIAB? Remember there were stories that he was going to be on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Was he ever appointed?

MR. NESSEN: Not yet.

Q Is he going to be?

MR. NESSEN: That Board has either a couple of vacancies on it or is being expanded, and we don't have any names to give you today.

Q Ron, has Robert Ingersoll informed the President that he intends to leave the State Department?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Can you take another foreign policy question? The Secretary General of the Organization for the African Unity has said that, "An effective and dependable bridgehead," for action against Rhodesia and South Africa, now exists.

Now, in view of Secretary Kissinger's repeated remarks that we can't allow the Cuban-Angolan experience to happen again --without saying what will happen--and in view of the President's very strong statements about relations with Cuba having gone to hell now -- that is, the reopening of relations has just about been dismissed -- in view of this statement, what is the White House feeling that we now have a bridgehead to Rhodesia and South Africa?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure I understand the question or what possible comment I could make on it.

Q In view of Secretary Kissinger's repeated statements that we can't allow this kind of thing to happen again, foreign adventurers, Soviet-backed foreign adventurers and opportunists and here we have an implied threat it is going to happen again, what would be the Administration's--

MR. NESSEN: I think it is hypothetical at the moment.

Q Ron, somewhat along those lines, last night when the President talked to the Inland Press Association and a question came up about Angola, he said, I think for the first time, that the two groups we were supporting in Angola -- UNITA and FNLA -- that until Congress said no, that those two groups were prevailing.

Now, I have not heard Kissinger or anyone else say that before. Was he saying to those publishers last night that Congress was, in effect, responsible for the fall of Angola and that the two groups we were supporting were prevailing?

MR. NESSEN: When I heard him discuss the matter, Tom, it was that in terms of until Congress forced the United States to stop helping the people who wanted the Angolans to choose their own Government, until Congress took that action, that the FNLA and UNITA were in a position to force a diplomatic settlement of the war and a Government of national unity.

But, once Congress forced, or tied the United States hands and those two sides went down, then there was no hope of a diplomatic settlement.

Q He went a little farther than that last night. He said with the release of that money those two forces were beating the MPLA and, until Congress said no, the forces we were supporting were prevailing. That is a fairly strong charge against Congress, and it seems to me to be an exaggeration of the situation, at the very least.

MR. NESSEN: I have to look up the record and see what happened in what order, but I know when I heard him talk about it, he indicated that that certainly destroyed the chance of a diplomatic settlement.

Q What about this question here, because as far as anyone knows, the President's statement does not in any sense correspond to the truth of the situation in Angola?

MR. NESSEN: How do we know that?

Q What is the basis for the President's statement?

MR. NESSEN: What is the basis for your saying it doesn't correspond with the truth?

Q As far as can be told from reading the newspaper accounts and so forth, it just isn't the case.

MR. NESSEN: I told Tom I would see what happened and in what order in relation to Congressional action and try to form some kind of scenario to back up that remark.

Q I can tell you that in February -- Kissinger was saying that in February and March of last year there was an opportunity to perhaps check the MPLA, but he has never suggested that our support of the FNLA or UNITA, that we were in fact beating the MPLA?

MR. NESSEN: Let me check the record and see what events happened in what order and see how it jibes with that statement.

Q Ron, is the use of the President's assertion of Executive privilege in the polygraphic exemption hearings, does this mark the opening of a new policy by the White House?

MR. NESSEN: It certainly doesn't. I think most of you got the copy of Bill Clements' letter that we put out yesterday written to Mrs. Abzug. I don't know that you have perhaps had an opportunity to look into this case at all, but Mrs. Abzug has subpoenaed one million two hundred thousand documents, going back to 1947.

If you read Bill Clements' letter, you will see the very specific reasons which, in addition to the practical reason of trying to provide one million two hundred thousand documents going back 28 years, you will see the specific reasons stated by the President in directing his Administration not to comply with that request.

Q Ron, what about directing the private companies involved not to comply with the request, isn't that going beyond the normal understanding of the --

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that that happened. From the exchange of correspondence I have, I don't see that private companies were ordered -- the directions went to the Attorney General and to the Secretary of Defense. I have no record of any Presidential directive going to private companies.

Q But the Attorney General, according to the hearings yesterday, suggested to the private companies that they not cooperate with Congress because the President was exerting Executive privilege.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of that, Bob. I will have to look into that.

Q Ron, does the President object to the testimony by the individuals called?

MR. NESSEN: I understand that a witness was sent yesterday to the committee to attempt to explain some of the things that were in the letter, and he was not permitted to do more than to give his name.

Q Has the President scratched his California trip? His campaign people say he has.

MR. NESSEN: He has not, Helen. It is still on the schedule.

Q What is that?

MR. NESSEN: The California trip. I don't have anything to say about it today, but it is still on the schedule.

Q When is it scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: The 11th and 12th. It is still on the schedule as of now.

Q What is the rethinking on it? Doesn't he want to campaign in California?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he does. Let me wait until some decision is made. If a decision is made to change it, I will let you know. At the moment there has not been that decision.

Q Is that one of the things discussed last night at the strategy meeting, whether to cancel that trip?

MR. NESSEN: Basically, the so-called strategy meeting was really basically a report to the President from the people who are running his campaign. There really wasn't a lot of discussion and give and take and decision-making. It was Rog and Bo and Stu reporting to the President on a variety of details of the campaign.

Q Did they tell him that anti-Washington was the biggest thing they had going for them?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't attend the meeting, so I don't know.

Q Is it still possible the President will go to the Middle East in the spring, or was that merely speculation?

MR. NESSEN: I tried to tell people before when the story came up that there is no Middle East trip planned and, if there is going to be one, consideration of one wouldn't even be undertaken for another month or so and then the decision would be made on the basis of whether it would be necessary for foreign policy reasons to go.

But, sitting down and even making that decision of whether a trip is needed for foreign policy reasons has not been made yet.

Q Does Dr. Kissinger know that? He is the one putting out the word. He was the one who did put out the word, pretty solid.

MR. NESSEN: I forget what he said, but he knows that.

Q Yesterday, when he was answering questions from those editors, he endorsed the concept of the so-called youth differential minimum wage. I am not aware that he has publicly endorsed that since becoming President. Are you aware whether he has said anything about that?

MR. NESSEN: We will check on it. She is working on the energy thing now.

Q Anyway, he has not made any major push for that?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know that much about it.

Q Ron, can you tell us anything about the strategy meeting last night?

MR. NESSEN: I just told you all I can tell you, which was it was basically a report to the President.

Q Can you give us an idea of what the report was?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Was it just on New Hampshire or other areas?

MR. NESSEN: Other areas.

Q What is the next trip after Florida?

MR. NESSEN: There is none scheduled at the moment. The California trip is the next one on the schedule.

Q Will he go to Illinois?

MR. NESSEN: I would think he would go to Illinois before the primary, but it is not on the schedule yet.

Q Can you give us an approximate time area?

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MR. NESSEN: If you look at the schedule, there is not much time left and he is campaigning mostly on weekends.

Q Ron, aside from Secret Service expenses, is the US Government underwriting any of Nixon's expenses in China, such as the party last night?

MR. NESSEN: None whatever.

Q Not the State Department; not any funds?

MR. NESSEN: He is a private citizen, and is paying for whatever expenses he incurs. Either he or the Chinese are paying the expenses. The Secret Service is required to go by an act of Congress, and there are no other expenses being paid by the Federal Government.

Q As long as we are on that subject --

MR. NESSEN: Aren't we always?

Q Your position here yesterday contrasted quite sharply, of course, with the position some of the campaign officials were giving at the headquarters the night before. I understand--if you had been asked on the day of the primary, on Tuesday, I guess--that you were prepared to say the same thing about the Nixon trip. Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not.

Q Your position, in other words, did not change from Tuesday to Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: No, I didn't have any position on Tuesday. On Wednesday, when I was asked about it, I said -- and I say today -- that it is simply not possible to assess what effect, if any, the Nixon trip had on the vote in New Hampshire.

Q I recall you saying that. I don't recall you being asked -- perhaps you were -- and if so, I will withdraw the question. But, I don't recall you being asked the additional question as to whether you subscribed to Mr. Spencer's comments Tuesday night, which were that he believed that the former President wanted John Connally as the Republican nominee.

On the assumption you weren't asked that specific question, what is your comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't asked, but I don't have any specific comments.

Q Do you agree with that statement?

MR. NESSEN: I have no comment on it.

Q Ron, does the President think that Mr. Reagan's financial statement was as fulsome as his or as fulsome as it should be for a candidate?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure that reporters who are covering the former Governor are going to be looking at that statement. The President put out his full financial statement listing income by sources and by years and taxes by State, Federal, or property and he feels that his full financial statement is a standard which all the other candidates should aim at.

Q Do you feel that the Reagan one is not a full financial statement, Ron? You seem to be implying that.

MR. NESSEN: I say the form and depth in which the President's financial position were published is a standard the President feels all candidates should try to match.

Naomi?

Q The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate has issued a report about the Mariana Islands becoming a commonwealth. How does the President feel about it?

MR. NESSEN: I understand it was a full Senate vote, 67 to 22, approving the covenant to establish a commonwealth for the Northern Mariana Islands, and the President welcomes the approval.

The House already has approved the covenant, so there is no need now for this legislation on the Northern Marianas to go to conference. I am sorry, there are minor differences, and it will have to go to conference to have those ironed out, which we hope will be done quickly.

I think you remember -- just a little background -- that the Northern Marianas residents approved a commonwealth status in a plebiscite observed by the U.N. last year.

Does that take care of your question, Naomi? We welcome the Senate's action and look forward to a speedy resolution of the differences with the House.

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That is why the President has recommended a simple extension with whatever powers it has under the Supreme Court ruling, and the members appointed in a Constitutional manner until after the election. The election started under one set of rules, and you have to finish the election under the same set of rules, then after the election, have the thing expire, and then let Congress take a look at it and rewrite it in any way it sees fit based on the experience of one full election. That is the President's view on the FEC.

Q Ron, will the President ask the Solicitor General to go before the Supreme Court and ask for a few more days to get this through Congress?

MR. NESSEN: It is not clear whether the White House has a standing in the case that would allow it to go to court and ask for an extension. I am told that some of the parties to the original action, specifically Common Cause, or the Commission itself, may go to court and ask for a 30-day extension because Congress clearly is not in a position to reconstitute this in the next few days.

Q Can the Justice Department, as amicus curiae, join in that action?

MR. NESSEN: It is not clear yet. They have not decided whether the Justice Department or the White House has a standing where they could go and ask for an extension.

Q Does the President favor a 30-day extension to give Congress more time to consider it?

MR. NESSEN: I think so, but let me check that, Russ.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:35 P.M. EST)