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NEWS CONFERENCE

#463

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. EST

MARCH 22, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President has a ceremony coming up at 12:15 in the Rose Garden in which he will receive a medallion from the Grand Lodge of the Masons in Washington. This medallion contains a likeness of Presidents Washington and Ford.

Originally the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia had asked the President to make a speech there in the spring. The President was not able to and this is a ceremony to receive this medallion.

The President did receive his initial Masonic degrees in this District of Columbia Lodge, although his home lodge is in Michigan.

Q Is he a 33rd degree Mason?

MR. NESSEN: I am going to have to check that, Les.

Then, as you know, at 12:30 the President is going to sign the Science and Technology Message to Congress. He will have some remarks at that time. It will be done in the Cabinet Room.

On a subject that may be of some interest to you -- if you remember the series of questions we have had about the report that former President Nixon was going to send in to the State Department, I think when we last left that story the former President had called and indicated to a functionary that his preference was to put the report in writing and to have it picked up and brought here for reading.

The functionary's name is William Gulley, whose title is Special Assistant to the Military Assistant to the President. He is a GS ranked civilian employee.

His first name is Warren, not William, Warren J. Gulley. His nickname is Bill. His title is Special Assistant to the Military Assistant to the President.

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Q How does he feel about being called a
functionary?

MR. NESSEN: He is a civilian with a GS rank.
That is where we last left the story --

Q I think you just said that when the former
President called -- are you now saying in fact it was
Mr. Nixon who called?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it was.

Q He talked to Gulley?

MR. NESSEN: He talked to Bill.

Then Nixon called again and indicated that the
report was ready to be picked up.

Q When was that?

MR. NESSEN: That was the week before last.
So then Gulley --

Q He called Gulley again?

MR. NESSEN: He called Gulley again. Let me just
mention this: Bill Gulley, among his duties here at the
White House, is the liaison with the wives, widows,
children of former Presidents as well as former Presidents.
He deals with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Johnson as well as the
Nixons and other relatives of former Presidents. That's
part of his duties here so that is why he is involved in
this.

Q Ron, do you know, has he always taken
Mr. Nixon's calls to the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You mean as opposed to
what? As opposed to somebody else?

Q Yes, since Mr. Nixon left the White House
he has called here a couple of times and I would like to know
if Mr. Gulley has taken those calls.

MR. NESSEN: Well, he has taken a lot of them.
Sometimes, I think, the former President has asked specifically
for Brent Scowcroft, let's say, or Secretary Kissinger.

Q Isn't it true that Jack Marsh's office is supposed to have the jurisdiction of --

MR. NESSEN: That was early on but that has been changed for quite some time now.

Q Why have you decided to identify Mr. Gulley? We tried to get him identified for ages.

MR. NESSEN: I know. I just think all that mystery business did not help any.

Q That is going to be your attitude from now on?

MR. NESSEN: That is it. No more mysteries.

Bill flew out there going by military space available aircraft from Andrews Air Force Base to Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City where he was not able to find another military ride so he then flew commercial from Oklahoma City to LA.

Q When did he do this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the exact date was, Dave.

Q Was it last week or the week before?

MR. NESSEN: I think it was the week before.

Q The dates are really important.

MR. NESSEN: I think I have got most of the dates. I don't have the exact date when he flew out there. Gulley picked up two copies of a report by Nixon which ran approximately 60 pages and they were in an envelope addressed to Kissinger.

Q Where did he pick it up?

MR. NESSEN: San Clemente.

Q So he went there and got it by hand? It was not left in a box?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Phone booth? (Laughter)

Q Did it contain two copies of the same report?

Q Did he pick them up at the San Clemente estate?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q One report, two copies of it, right?

MR. NESSEN: Right, in one envelope.

Then Gulley flew back to Washington on a military space available aircraft to Andrews Air Force Base from California.

Now, that was the weekend before last that Gulley returned from California.

Q Can we have that date when he returned?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether it was Sunday or Saturday night or what, but it was then. And Gulley gave it to Brent Scowcroft. Brent gave one copy to Kissinger on Monday and the other copy to the President on Tuesday.

Q Why didn't he give them both on Monday?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q The President gave his copy back to Brent on Thursday and Kissinger gave his copy back to Brent on Friday?

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Q We are up to last Thursday and Friday now?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Why did they give them back?

MR. NESSEN: The former President requested that the two copies be returned to him.

Q After they were Xeroxed, or before?

Q Would you repeat that again? He gave it to the President when?

MR. NESSEN: You mean in terms of what Brent did?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Brent gave a copy to the President on Tuesday, and the President gave it back, after having read it, gave it back on Thursday. Brent gave a copy to Kissinger on Monday and Kissinger gave it back, having read it, on Friday.

As I say, the former President asked that the two copies be returned to him.

Q How, Ron? How is it going to get back to him?

MR. NESSEN: Just a minute. I have every intimate detail.

Q Did they Xerox a copy?

MR. NESSEN: The President said he made no copies and Brent said he made no copies. (Laughter)

There is a fourth party, too, incidentally. I have not talked to Henry. George Bush has read it on Friday in Brent's office. So, the people who read it were the President, Kissinger, George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, four people.

Q You don't know how many people Kissinger might have showed it to, though?

MR. NESSEN: I do not.

Q You said Bush read it Friday in the President's office?

MR. NESSEN: In Brent's office.

Q So, you are only accounting for two possibilities of the not Xeroxing? You can't speak for Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot.

Q Or Bush?

MR. NESSEN: I can't speak for George because I have not talked to him.

Q Bush read it in Scowcroft's office?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. He read it right there and gave it back to Brent.

Q It is classified?

MR. NESSEN: It is not classified because it is a document written by a civilian with no authority to classify.

Q By a private citizen.

MR. NESSEN: Private citizen, if you will.

Now we are up to Friday, and the four people have read it. Let me go back a few days and tell you this. Last week Nixon called Brent on Wednesday to make sure it had arrived safely.

Q Did he talk to Mr. Gulley?

MR. NESSEN: He did not. He talked to Brent. He may have talked to Gulley. I don't know one way or the other whether he talked to Gulley, but he talked to Brent, just to make sure it arrived safely and just to ask if Brent found it useful. Brent said yes.

Q Did he elaborate on that, in what way he found it useful?

MR. NESSEN: No, he didn't.

Q Right at that point had Brent read it before he gave it to the President on Tuesday and Kissinger on Monday?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know when Brent read it, actually.

Q Specifically, had he read it? Had it been read by him by Wednesday, by the time Mr. Nixon called on Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, by the time Nixon called he had read it.

Q If this is by a private citizen and it is not classified, why is it we can't read it under Freedom of Information?

MR. NESSEN: You can, but it is not here anymore. It is out at San Clemente.

Q That is called Catch 22.

MR. NESSEN: I haven't finished the rest of the story yet. The rest of the story is Brent gave it back to Gulley on Saturday. Gulley called Brennan and said, "Okay, we are ready to send the report back to you. How about putting it in the mail," and Brennan said "that is fine with us," and it was mailed on Saturday. Gulley talked to Brennan this morning, and it has arrived out there. It is back at San Clemente.

Q It was just sent through regular mail?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q And it arrived today?

MR. NESSEN: That is what Brennan told Gulley.

Q Was the President's copy sent back in the same envelope?

MR. NESSEN: Both copies were sent back in the same envelope, yes.

I guess the only other element is what does the President think of it. The President says "very interesting and useful."

Q That is all he said?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Was it constructive? (Laughter)

Q How long did you say it was, about 60 pages?

MR. NESSEN: It was about 60 pages.

Q Single spaced?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I didn't see it.

Q Does the President consider it an important report?

MR. NESSEN: I think those are the only words he used to describe it.

Q Ron, when did you first find out about this?

MR. NESSEN: I would just prefer not to go down that track now.

Q Well, your credibility is at stake here.

MR. NESSEN: How is that?

Q I asked you on Friday whether you had asked, and you said you did not know anything about that.

MR. NESSEN: I checked all the transcripts for last week, Howard, and I could not find that you asked on Friday. It was asked about on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Q How about the week before?

MR. NESSEN: Okay. The NSC knew that you and I were interested in being notified when the thing arrived, and they failed to notify me when it arrived.

Q Have you complained about that?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why did they do that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, but I will find out and it won't happen again.

Q Why does Kissinger get a report from the former President before the President gets it?

MR. NESSEN: As you remember, that was the arrangement worked out over the telephone, that it would be mailed in or that it would be sent here for Kissinger and if he thought it was interesting, he would show it to the President. As it turned out, Nixon sent two copies, one for Kissinger and one for the President, so Brent gave one copy to the President.

Q You mean the President would let Kissinger make a decision on whether something was interesting or not?

MR. NESSEN: We said that a long time ago, Helen.

Q Ron, would you deny this has the appearance of a conspiracy in the White House to cover up Mr. Nixon's report?

MR. NESSEN: I would, Tom.

Q Why would the NSC keep you from having information about the report being here, knowing about our interest?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, I will find that out. I intend to find it out. I have told a lot of people of my displeasure, and it will not happen again.

Q Have you told the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why didn't he tell you about it?

MR. NESSEN: I never bothered to ask him because I knew the NSC knew of my interest and your interest and I counted on them to let me know.

Q Ron, does the President know our interest in this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether he does or not, Phil.

Q Hartmann said the President reads the transcript almost every day of these briefings.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that that is true.

Q Do you communicate with him and tell him there is interest in the press room?

MR. NESSEN: In this case, since it was going to come to the State Department first -- I thought it was going to come to the State Department first -- and then it would have come through the NSC, I thought, as I said, that I would have been told by the NSC.

Q Ron, did any of these people tell you anything about the contents, the substance of this report.

MR. NESSEN: Did they?

Q Yes. Do you know anything about the substance of this report?

MR. NESSEN: No, only the President's reaction to it.

Q Why did the former President want this report back? Isn't it a contribution to the Government, really?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I don't know why he wanted it back, and I don't know any way I could answer that question.

Q Ron, if the President thought the report was useful, why would he not have explored the possibility of having a copy retained or a copy made for the records here?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that, Dave.

Q Ron, since this is not a classified report, are we going to get any sort of briefing on what it contains?

MR. NESSEN: The document is not here now, Howard, and I don't know how.

Q It has been read by at least four people, and they are not sworn to secrecy, obviously.

MR. NESSEN: Let me say this. It is not classified because Nixon does not have the authority to classify anything. But, that is not to say the document does not contain sensitive material.

Q Ron, could we assume somebody at least made some notes?

MR. NESSEN: I am told Brent made about a half-page of notes.

Q Are those classified?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will have to ask him.

Q I am a bit at a loss to understand the treatment of this report in view of that fact that the point was made repeatedly when the former President went to China that he was the first well-known American, and certainly the first American of experience in Government, to meet with the new Premier of China or the Acting Premier of China since the death of Chou En-lai, and Kissinger himself said in Latin America although he might have chosen a different avenue, he was very interested in knowing anything Nixon had to say about the new leadership in China.

A report arrives, as far as you know no copies of it are made, a half page of notes are taken, a half page sounding rather sketchy to describe a 60-page report. Why sort of what appears to be at least casual or superficial treatment of a report that has been characterized by Kissinger as potentially quite important?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen Henry's characterization of the report.

Q That is a matter of fact, Ron. Kissinger said at a press conference in Latin America, during the Latin America trip, that he would be very interested in seeing what the former President had to say and we were interested in any kind of contact like that. He might have chosen another way, but as long as this was the way it turned out he would be very interested.

Yet as far as we can tell, nothing has been done to preserve this report, to preserve any record of it, copy of it or anything else. Why not, in view of that kind of importance that was attached?

MR. NESSEN: It was read by four of the foremost senior foreign policy and intelligence officials in the Government and notes were made by one.

Q Is there some reason why they didn't want a copy of this report made that could circulate to somewhat lower eschelons but still very important people that might have the responsibility for foreign policy on a day-to-day basis? Is there some reason they didn't want a bunch of copies floating around?

MR. NESSEN: I can't answer that question, Jim.

Q How about the Vice President of the United States? Did he get to read it?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he did not.

Q Was this a personal request on the part of Nixon, a personal request that it be returned?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it was.

Q Did he give any reason?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge.

Q Was Mr. Gates shown a copy?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge he was not.

Q Ron, were there any restrictions put on by Mr. Nixon as to the distribution of the report?

MR. NESSEN: It was a copy addressed to Kissinger and a copy addressed to the President.

Q What is the reason why Mr. Gates didn't see it? Wouldn't that be something useful to him if it is useful to the President?

MR. NESSEN: Gates has been nominated and not confirmed. That is the only reason I can think of as to why he was not shown a copy.

Q Ron, would it be possible for you or Margy to get a summary of what it says from Brent and let us know?

MR. NESSEN: I can check that out.

Q Would you also find out if Nixon stated a reason for wanting the report back?

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Did he make that request in writing or verbally?

MR. NESSEN: Verbally.

Q Would it be fair to say that in view of the fact that the President has only four words to say about it, and that only half a page --

MR. NESSEN: Counting "and."

Q And that Scowcroft made only a half a page of notes that we could say that the report did not contain any major new information that was not known before?

MR. NESSEN: Since I have not read the report, it is hard for me to characterize it.

Q Have you read General Scowcroft's notes?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Have you had a description given to you by Scowcroft or anyone else that could lead you to answer Dick's question?

MR. NESSEN: I just would rather not characterize it, having not read it myself. I have heard others talk about it, but since I have not read it I would rather not talk about it.

Q Ron, it appears clearly that you have not been treated fairly, Ron, as the Press Secretary. Really, seriously. They knew the interest that everybody had and they did not tell you. Now wouldn't it be fair of them to have Scowcroft come out here because you have been treated shabbily, in my opinion, Ron. I really mean that sincerely.

MR. NESSEN: For one of the few times in our life we agree, Les. I will ask Brent about that.

Q This is a pattern with the whole NSC really.

Q This is more of a statement than a question, but we have had cases where ter Horst -- one of the reasons he stepped out of this White House was because top aides were not telling him what was going on. This is now the second example and it really puts in question the credibility of the Ford White House.

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think it does, Phil. I think that is too sweeping a statement.

Q We have two concrete examples. Where Mr. ter Horst was not getting information and he said so. We have a case where you, as Press Secretary, walk out and say you were not given information. So we do have two documented examples.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but I think your conclusion is too sweeping from those two documented examples.

Q Even the President has chosen not to keep you fully informed.

MR. NESSEN: I disagree with that. He has always kept me fully informed, not only directly but by fully insisting that I attend the meetings at which policy is discussed.

Q How can you say he keeps you fully informed when you did not know about this and the President read the report and did not bother to tell you? Obviously you are not.

MR. NESSEN: This was something that happened in the NSC.

Q And in the Oval Office.

MR. NESSEN: Not in the Oval Office.

Q Wherever the President of the United States read this it happened, you have direct contact with him, and he did not bother to tell you.

Now how are we to believe that you are fully informed?

MR. NESSEN: I think the problem is with the NSC and not in the Oval Office.

Q But the President was aware of our interest and he does read the transcripts.

MR. NESSEN: He does not always. Whether he did last week, I don't know.

Q You pointed out this was brought up at least three times last week. Is it conceivable he missed all three of those transcripts?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim, whether he did or not.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim, whether he did or not.

Q Ron, what was his reaction when you brought it up to him, that you had been cut out of information that you should have had?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is something we will be working on here.

Q Ron, did Scowcroft deliver the copy to the President personally or did he send it through Cheney's office?

MR. NESSEN: Delivered it personally.

Q Did the President indicate he would personally get involved in trying to determine why you were not informed by the NSC?

MR. NESSEN: I think I can work that out myself, Phil.

Q So he is not going to get involved?

MR. NESSEN: He is aware of the problem.

Q Ron, you said twice this is not going to happen again. Have you been given assurances by the NSC?

MR. NESSEN: It is going to get worked out and it will not happen again.

Q Ron, did you have a standing request to the NSC and anybody else concerned that you wanted to be informed if a report arrived and about what happened to it after that, or did people just sort of have to assume you wanted to know that?

MR. NESSEN: No. I think the NSC was fully aware of my interest and your interest.

Q Does the President still regard this report as a private communication from a private citizen, private tourist, to the Secretary of State?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, with the proviso that, obviously, it is a private citizen who has had a unique experience and who has a unique background.

Q Ron, are you saying the NSC deliberately withheld this information from you?

MR. NESSEN: Well, rather than make any kind of judgment, the fact is that they knew of my interest and did not let me know when the report came.

Q In the chronology I missed when you found out. Did you find out in Time Magazine last night or this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go into when I found out.

Q Is this the way you found out?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go into when I found out.

Q I would like to go a little deeper, if I might, into your relations as Press Secretary with the NSC because, as Phil pointed out, there have been two documented examples. However, earlier in your tenure as Press Secretary in Palm Springs, based on information you said you had received from the NSC, you made a statement about negotiations with the North Vietnamese that you later had to completely change and revise. At that time you indicated both publicly and privately that you were quite unhappy with the NSC, NSC staff. So this is a third instance.

In this particular instance you were not kept informed, you were misinformed, or so you said at the time. What are your relations with the NSC? Why are these things happening now to you as Press Secretary and what are you trying to do about it? Do you have some kind of difficulty or poison or problem in your relations with the NSC or what?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think I would like to work out my relationship with the NSC myself and not make it a matter of public discussion here today.

Q Let me ask you the question this way. Based on the incident in Palm Springs and now this incident, do you acknowledge you are having difficulties with the NSC?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am not going to go into that today at this briefing.

Q I have a non-NSC question. I asked twice last week about this. The first time you indicated that you had not checked with the State Department. The second time -- which I still believe was on Friday -- I asked you if specifically had you asked the State Department if it had arrived and your answer was yes.

MR. NESSEN: I checked the transcripts for last week and it did not come up on Friday at all, Howard. It came up on Thursday at which time I said I can speak for the White House but I could not speak for the State Department.

Q I asked you if you had asked the State Department press people and you said yes.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I did. The transcript doesn't show that.

Q Ron, when you talk about the NSC you use these initials but who is at the NSC? Is it Brent Scowcroft who purposely kept it from you?

MR. NESSEN: Annie, I am going to work out my relationship with the NSC myself.

Q But the NSC is people -- who is at the NSC?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is an internal matter within the White House which we are working out.

Q Ron, the liaison with the NSC -- was Margy aware of this?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, as I say, I am not going to answer any questions on my relationship with the NSC because it is in the process of being resolved.

Q Ron, had the report already been returned by the time you found out that they had been here?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to go into that, Ted.

Q Was it Mr. Nixon's idea that the report be given such limited circulation or was it the Secretary's or the President's?

MR. NESSEN: Mary, he only sent two copies and one was addressed to Henry and one was addressed to the President.

Q Ron, was this a deliberate attempt by the NSC to keep the report secret? Would you say it was not or would you deny that or how would you describe that?

MR. NESSEN: On the one hand, I don't know why they would want to keep it secret.

Q But, it does look as if they didn't do it?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to make any judgment.

Q Did the former President give you a time limit on this, when he wanted it back?

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not, as far as I know.

Q Did this report contain information the President was not aware of before?

MR. NESSEN: There again, Jim was asking me to characterize the thing. I think it would be fair to say the report did not contain any startling new information.

Q Did Mr. Nixon request that the contents of the report be made public?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that.

Q The statement about no startling information must come from the President since you did not see the report and the President was the only one who saw it, or Scowcroft. Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q So who said it, Ford?

MR. NESSEN: Both.

Q Ron, as you know, there was a Time report that indicated that Nixon said the reason he was invited was because the Chinese wanted to indicate their interest in having the United States continue to play a role in Asia. I know you have not read the report, but based on your conversations of this morning, would you say that is a correct statement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to characterize it any further, John. Since I have not read it, it wouldn't be fair to characterize it.

Q But have you heard anyone make that statement?

MR. NESSEN: I told you just about everything I know about the report.

Q May I ask one other question. Apparently the Nixon report has not been the subject at the morning staff meetings, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Or you would have heard about it?

MR. NESSEN: You mean last week?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: That is true. It did not come up last week. Do you mean at the senior staff meeting?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: That is right, it did not come up at the senior staff meeting, and it did not come up at my meetings with the President because I was relying on the NSC to let me know when it arrived.

Q Does Scowcroft attend those meetings every day, or almost every day?

MR. NESSEN: Which ones?

Q The senior staff meetings, and you have given us a chronology as to when this report was received, when it was given to the President, when it was given to Ford, and the fact that Scowcroft had it to begin with. Are you saying to us throughout the morning senior staff meetings all last week Scowcroft never mentioned in those meetings that this report had come in from Nixon? Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Then how in the world can you see anything here but an effort by the NSC to keep this report quiet, to keep it secret? What other reason would he have had?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to make any judgments on the NSC's motives.

Q Nevertheless, for fully a week Scowcroft kept the existence of this report secret from the rest of the senior staff of the White House, is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: He did not bring it up at the senior staff meeting.

Q Do you know whether he told any other senior staff informally that it had come in?

MR. NESSEN: The only four people I know who have read the report are the ones I mentioned.

Q I don't mean read it, but did Scowcroft tell senior staff members, okay, we have the report in from Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Jim.

Q Does the President still have full confidence in General Scowcroft?

MR. NESSEN: Why do you ask that question?

Q Because of all the previous questions.

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand how your question arises.

Q He apparently withheld some information from you, for one thing.

MR. NESSEN: I think I have said fairly clearly that is going to be resolved and not happen again.

Q Does the President still have full confidence in him?

MR. NESSEN: Since I feel the question grows out of nothing I am not going to -- the answer is obviously yes -- but I don't know why the President needs to reaffirm his confidence in Brent this morning.

Q Ron, I am somewhat puzzled here because the President has not personally gotten involved in making sure this does not happen again. It is his Administration and this comes off as not looking like the Administration wanted to be totally honest and totally candid on this.

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree with that, Phil.

Q Isn't he concerned about the image of this whole thing, the fact that you were not told about it?

MR. NESSEN: Again, those kinds of internal workings are being resolved, but I don't know what you mean about making the Administration look bad. As I have said before, this particular issue seems to be of much more concern with you than it is here, but on the question of my knowledge, which I think is quite high, with some holes, that is going to be resolved.

Q Do you know whether Cheney and Buchen were aware the report was in the house?

MR. NESSEN: They were.

Q At what point?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know at what point.

Q Did you get the impression, Ron, this was just a communication screw-up? There is nothing Machiavellian going on?

MR. NESSEN: There is nothing Machiavellian going on, I know that.

Q It is just lousy staff work? Is that basically what you are saying, you don't see anything Machiavellian going on?

MR. NESSEN: That is a wonderful choice, between a Machiavellian plot or a staff screw-up. Let's see now which one. Are those the only two choices?

Q That is all you get. That is it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know those are the only two choices.

Q The President apparently has confidence in Scowcroft, according to you, Ron. Does Scowcroft have confidence in you and, if he does have confidence in you, why would he withhold this rather important, newsworthy item from you?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the answer to that yet.

Q Ron, on the whole Nixon matter, from the beginning you have had misinformation. You said he talked to a functionary. It turned out Kissinger made a personal call to Nixon. From the whole chronology of this you have been wrong.

MR. NESSEN: It was not handled with the most style and grace that I have seen around here.

Q Ron, let me carry this further. Were Hartmann and Marsh aware the report was in the house?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Dave.

Q Ron, a few minutes ago you said there seemed to be more importance attached to this out here. I believe that is the second or third time you characterized it that way. I recall on the night of the New Hampshire election the President's now acting campaign manager referred to that as a possibility of losing -- if the President lost the Nixon trip would be the cause. Is it possible that Brent Scowcroft, because of the political sensitivity of this thing, kept it only to himself for all this time?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it has any political sensitivity. I think most of you know the post-New Hampshire polling indicated it had zero effect in New Hampshire.

Q It had that effect, but his campaign manager-- at that time deputy--thought it might have a lot of effect.

MR. NESSEN: It turned out to be not true.

Q Ron, while the report itself was not discussed at a senior staff meeting -- you said that, right?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Was there a discussion at the senior staff meeting about how to handle the report, about what to do about it when it comes in?

MR. NESSEN: NO, there was not.

Q Ron, could you tell us who recommended that Director Bush read it? Was it the President or General Scowcroft who suggested that Bush have a look at it before it got back?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I know George has been interested in reading it.

Q But somebody had to say, okay, you can see it. What I am interested in knowing is, was it the President or General Scowcroft?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q But he saw it in this building?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, has Nixon given you any assurances that he won't be available to talk about it and that he is not going to talk about it while everybody here is being very delicate about it and do you wonder about being pre-empted by him?

MR. NESSEN: I myself haven't talked to Nixon. I don't know what his plans are. I don't know what you mean by delicate about it here. I thought we sort of laid it out pretty bluntly here.

Q I can't understand his claim on this. He makes a report for the President, to the President. Suddenly he gets it back.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it does have sensitive material in it. It is not classified because he is a civilian and a private citizen has no classification authority.

Q Why was it necessary to send an airplane to get it?

MR. NESSEN: There was not any airplane sent to get it.

Q Why did you have to send a functionary out to get this when you did not take it back to him this way?

MR. NESSEN: The former President requested that it be picked up.

Q Would it be accurate then to say as far as you know, only four people have read the report?

MR. NESSEN: As well as the former President, who wrote it.

Q Are you seriously suggesting no copies have been made of this report?

MR. NESSEN: Muriel, I talked to two of the four people who have read the report, and the President said he made no Xerox or any other kind of copy, and Brent Scowcroft said he did not make a copy. I have not talked to Henry, and I have not talked to George Bush.

Q Do you know if Gulley read it?

MR. NESSEN: I do not know that.

Q It helps pass the time on a long night.
(Laughter)

Q What is the President doing for the rest of the week?

MR. NESSEN: Friday, as you know, we are going to California, and Saturday to California, and stop in Wisconsin on the way back.

Q You say a second day in California or part of the second day?

MR. NESSEN: Part of the second day in California.

Q And stop in Wisconsin on the way back?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Where is the stop in Wisconsin?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have that all worked out yet.

Q Return when, Saturday night, Sunday morning? Two nights out or one night out?

MR. NESSEN: One night out. He may have one or two other messages to Congress this week, in addition to the Space and Technology Message.

Q You know what on?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but I would rather not say it for the moment.

Q Does he have anything more to say on the FEC new authority? Is it going to go down the drain or is there any possibility of saving it?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has said all there is to say from his behalf, Helen, that he really believes that this is something that should be in place for the rest of the election and thinks the American people look toward it as a guarantee of clean elections. He simply urges Congress to pass a reconstitution of the commission and an extension of the law until this election can be conducted and then after the election look at the record of how the law worked and if Congress desires at that time, to revise it.

Q What is the outlook, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure this is the place to get the outlook from, but I think you know the outlook.

Q Ron, in checking with the Pentagon's helopad about the helicopter ride for which Senator Percy tried to pay, but some unknown in the White House turned him down, I learned that the helicopter was waiting to pick up Senator Laxalt of Nevada.

I wonder, why does the White House provide this helicopter for Governor Reagan's campaign chairman?

MR. NESSEN: Larry is the helicopter transportation expert. He will look into it for you. I don't know the answer, Les.

Q For the record, what is Mr. Gulley's primary job in the White House? You characterized him as a functionary, one who takes telephone calls in liaison with former Presidents. What is his principal job?

MR. NESSEN: I don't mean to demean the liaison job. It is not simply taking phone calls. He is liaison with the widows and children of former Presidents, as well as the former President.

Q Isn't he currently in charge of the military operation of the White House scheduling helicopters, planes and other military aircraft all over the world, including scheduling of all the Presidential aircraft?

MR. NESSEN: I know that he is the ongoing civil servant in the Office of the Military Aide.

Q Is that not considered one of the most important jobs in the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know his full breakdown of his job description, but I know that is what he does.

Q He handles helicopters, doesn't he, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

Q You are still standing by with your original description of a functionary, though?

MR. NESSEN: I used that expression at a time when it was felt that it was not necessary to talk about Bill by name, but whatever the term functionary means -- he performs a function.

Q You used that term to try to mislead us, to try to throw us off the scent, off the track, isn't that right?

MR. NESSEN: That is not right, Jim. I used that term because there was a feeling it would be better not to have Bill's name connected with that.

Q Why did you change that?

MR. NESSEN: As I said this morning, I just thought the unnecessary mystery created was not worth the effort.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:20 P.M. EST)