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NEWS CONFERENCE

#483

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:28 P.M. EST

APRIL 21, 1976

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: One item that was added to the schedule, at 9:55 there was a farewell call by Ambassador W. Beverly Carter on the President. He is the Ambassador who is about to leave for his new post in Liberia. It was just an opportunity to say goodbye to the President.

Q Was Secretary Kissinger there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think Secretary Kissinger is -- yes, I am sorry, he was. He got back last night. I was not sure he was back yet. Also, Brent was in the meeting, too.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon, the President is going to be talking to a group of Texas reporters and bureau chiefs who are based in Washington.

Q Will Sarah be there?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah will be there and Margaret will be there, and all the others who represent Texas papers and are based in Washington. This is in response to a number of individual requests we have had for interviews, both from the papers and from their individual correspondents and bureau chiefs, and the President decided to see them together.

Q How many of them are there?

MR. NESSEN: Twenty-three. (Newspapers represented)

Texas happens to have, incidentally, just to state a fact, the largest number of reporters based in Washington of any State.

Q You mean, the largest number of bureaus?

MR. NESSEN: The largest number of newspapers represented of any State, sorry.

Most of these papers, I understand, plan to print this in their a.m. editions of tomorrow, so my plan was to put out the transcript at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

MORE

#483

Q Why can't you put out the transcript, you know, some time today and make it advance for p.m.'s tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: I guess we could do that.

Q Make it what?

MR. NESSEN: If we can get the transcript done, we will put it out this afternoon embargoed for p.m.'s tomorrow.

Q Is there going to be any news in it?
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: All right. You saw the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Then, the consumer price index came out this morning for the month of March. The increase in the cost of living was two-tenths of one percent and food and gasoline prices were down in March. This means that the inflation for the first three months of 1976 was 2.9 on an annual basis compared to 7 percent last year. The President views this as excellent news. He welcomes it and feels that it is further evidence that his economic policies are working but, as I have said before and I do want to emphasize, there is no --

Q Could you go a little slower?

MR. NESSEN: The President thinks it is excellent news and welcomes it and it is further evidence that the President's economic policies are working.

At the same time, I want to raise the same caution I had before, which is that no one here believes it will be possible to sustain this low level of inflation in the coming months.

Q And if it is not sustained, will it still mean that the President's policies are working?

MR. NESSEN: Well, it will be at a relatively low level, Cliff, but it will not be at the level of a tenth of a percent as it was last month or two-tenths of a percent as in March.

The trip tomorrow and the next day to Indiana and Georgia, the press check-in, there has been a slight change from what we told you before. The press check-in time has been changed to 3:45 at Andrews and that is with luggage, I guess.

Is that earlier or later than we announced?

Q Later.

MR. NESSEN: And the press plane will leave at 4:15 to fly to Indianapolis.

Now, have you received anything on the Texas trip next week?

Q No.

Q About tomorrow, can you tell us what the day will be like up until the afternoon? Do you expect to have a briefing or meetings planned?

MR. NESSEN: I will have one if you want one.

Q I am just trying to find out for certain planning of the trip.

MR. NESSEN: It will be a pretty regular day here tomorrow, Tom. There will be meetings. I don't know of any major events here tomorrow but the routine run of news, I think.

On Texas, then, it is going to be from Tuesday the 27th through Friday the 30th. Let me try to give you just the highlights at this point because, really, the advance teams are still out there and it really is not locked up beyond the outline I am going to give you.

On Tuesday, the President will be leaving the White House in mid-day and will go to Shreveport, Louisiana, to participate in an annual event there called "Holiday in Dixie."

Would you rather just see this in writing?

Q Yes.

Q Have you got them ready?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is he coming back on Friday?

MR. NESSEN: Shortly before midnight on Friday.

Do you have weekend plans, Muriel?

Q What time is the "Holiday in Dixie," Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I guess it would be late afternoon, early evening, something like that.

Q Is the press going to overnight in Tyler, Texas?

MR. NESSEN: Would you like to make some other arrangement?

Q The overnight is in Dallas.

Q I don't understand, Tyler --

Q The Southern fried chicken place.

MR. NESSEN: Which is the chicken-fried steak night? Is that Dallas or Houston, or both? (Laughter)

Q We are going to skip the Tarrant County Bar Association?

MR. NESSEN: And go directly to Fran's, or whatever it is called?

I don't see anything else that I have to announce to you.

Q Ron, is Greenspan coming along any further on revising those economic assumptions? You said he had been waiting for some other stuff and I think it has been a while.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't check with him lately. Let me do that.

Q Ron, will the President enforce that Supreme Court ruling yesterday on low-income housing in the suburbs?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the decision was to send the case back to the lower court and other than that the decision is complicated and it is being studied here and, other than that, I don't have any other comment.

Q Are you talking about the housing decision?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, HUD was saying this morning you were going to have some comment on that and there might even be counsel over here to talk about it. What happened to such plans?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know of any such plans. I talked to the President about it and Phil Buchen about it and the specific order issued by the Court was to return it to the lower court. There was no remedy ordered by the Supreme Court.

Q You didn't plan to have a lawyer over here to brief us this morning on it?

MR. NESSEN: No, I didn't have any plan like that.

Other than that, Phil wants to read it more thoroughly and the President wants to read it and --

Q But that suggests that the President has misgivings about the decision. Would you like to tell us --

MR. NESSEN: What suggests that to you, Walt?

Q Well, Phil Buchen wants to read it a little and study it. My question was very simple: Will the President enforce that decision of the Court?

MR. NESSEN: The decision of the Court was to send the case back to the lower court and I think HUD said yesterday that, yes, it would go back and argue its case in the lower court, so the answer is yes, the decision to go back to the lower court, obviously, is to be followed.

Q Ron, did the President agree with the basic thrust of the decision which, as I understand it, held that if HUD has been guilty of encouraging discrimination, ghettoization, that the courts can order HUD to locate low-income housing in the suburbs?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not enough of a lawyer to know whether that is an accurate description of the case, Ed, and that is why Phil and the President both want to read the decision before commenting on it.

Q Any general reaction without going into --

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think this is something you can have a general reaction to. It is a legal opinion of the Supreme Court and he wants to read it before commenting on it.

Q John Gardner said this morning that even though the legislation is not here, the President ought to go ahead and declare whether he is going to sign or veto the Federal Election thing so the candidates can borrow money.

MR. NESSEN: What is in it?

Q Gardner says that what is in it is pretty well-known.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that what is in it has not even been written down on paper yet, much less well-known.

Q My understanding is that the conferees have agreed on it, it is all down in writing; they just didn't get through the mechanics of it before they left.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that the conferees agreed on a general outline of what they wanted in the bill and never got around to putting it into legislative language. It is not this legislation, particularly, it is any piece of legislation. The President, you know, would not ordinarily, with any piece of legislation in this state, say he will sign it or he will veto it. It is not possible.

Q Does the fact that this makes it more difficult for Ronald Reagan to borrow money while he waits for the matching funds have anything at all to do with the President's --

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I think you know the history of this. The President has looked over his own record because he has heard these kinds of comments being cranked out, and I think if you will review his own record, as he has today, you will see what dates the Court ruled, how quickly after that the President asked Congress to quickly re-enact the law so that this money could go out to the candidates. There were a series of Presidential statements urging Congress to act quickly. Congress took several vacations, let deadlines go by, and so forth.

The President feels his record is very straightforward on this issue and, as I say, he checked it to make sure and he has urged Congress, I guess from the day of or maybe the day after the original Court decision, to hurry on and re-enact that law constitutionally so that candidates could get their money and that the rules would be enforced.

Q Does that mean he is going to sign it?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, there is no way of knowing what the legislation looks like. But I think your suggestion was, you were saying that the President somehow is dragging his feet on this matter -- I think you referred to the fact that it is hurting Reagan's money efforts or something -- it was in your question -- but I am trying to review his record and I think you will see that it is a good record in terms of urging quick enactment of law, and not the opposite.

Q You are not saying the President is going to sign the bill when it gets here?

MR. NESSEN: There is no bill to say yes or no on because there is nothing that he can say "that is good legislation, that is bad legislation."

Q Ron, since the elements have shown no leadership in this area, in the White House view what has the President done in the last few days to show leadership in trying to get this resolved?

MR. NESSEN: Congress has not been here in the last few days, Phil. You know, I am speaking in some detail about this because the President is aware of the interest in the issue and some of the things being said about his record on this and he did review his record to make sure that it was a good one, and it is. But I can pull out every statement the President has made on this.

It is the Congress which has gone home on either two or three vacations while this matter has been pending. It is Congress that went away without resolving the Conference Report and getting legislation here. The President has urged repeatedly that they quickly pass this legislation.

Q But he won't say whether he is going to sign it?

MR. NESSEN: But there is nothing to say that about, Bob, because there is no legislation yet.

Q Ron, what about talking with any leaders?

MR. NESSEN: Congress is not here. You know, of course, of various meetings that have been held here -- bipartisan leadership meetings, leadership meetings. Almost always the President has spoken on this. He has made public statements from right here --

Q Ron, excuse me. I am going back, I think, to Phil's question --

MR. NESSEN: Look, Cliff, the details of when did he say this, when did he say that, I think you know as well as I do, and as the President checked and confirmed to himself this morning that his record is good on this and we will put out all the statements and give you what the dates were when they were made, but, you know, chipping around the edges like this and saying, "Well, he didn't call him, he didn't call him," -- you know who is at fault as well as I do on this.

Q Ron, the elements of this legislation are known, if not the precise language that would put those elements into effect.

MR. NESSEN: That is not the way you judge legislation, Jim. It is what the general outline of it is. Legislation is a legal document and this --

Q Does the President have any views on the outlines as they are known of what this legislation would contain?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure that he knows what this --

Q It seems to me a fair question to ask whether the President has called a Republican Member, say, of that Conference Committee, somebody that he may know personally, and ask for a general outline of what is in the bill, and then reacted perhaps negatively to some elements of that bill? Maybe there are objections that he has that the country deserves to know about and certainly the candidates who are waiting for the money.

MR. NESSEN: Tom, the President is clearly on the record from the day of the Supreme Court decision saying pass this legislation quickly so that these candidates can get their money, and the way to do that is a simple extension of the Commission, meeting the constitutional objections that the Court raised, and do it quickly, and he said that over and over again.

Now the Congress has decided to go another way which he said would be time consuming and would allow the deadline to run out. He has warned about this at every step. Now there is no legislation agreed upon, as I understand it and as the President understands it, for him to say, "Yes, I will sign it, no, I will veto it." There is simply nothing to make a judgment on. But I have heard him in the private meetings, in various meetings with Congressional leaders, urge speedy enactment of an FEC extension.

Q I understand, but in his public comments he has suggested very strongly in the past that he would veto a revised FEC bill if it did anything more than simply make the requirements necessary to meet the Supreme Court objections.

MR. NESSEN: Well, that is not exactly what he said, Tom. What he said was that he would not hesitate to veto a bill which changed the rules in the middle of the game. I mean all the candidates have gotten started in this campaign under a certain set of rules, and then you get about half way through the primary season and then there is an effort to change the rules, or new legislation which would involve long litigation which, in effect, would simply negate an extension of the FEC -- he says he would not hesitate to veto that kind of legislation and that is still his position.

Q Ron, has he talked to Chuck Wiggins about this?

MR. NESSEN: The White House Congressional Liaison Office has talked to Congressman Wiggins and has reported to the President on the conversation, and others, I should say.

Q Did Mr. Wiggins indicate that he would recommend signing?

MR. NESSEN: He offered a recommendation.

Q Affirmative?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think you ought to talk to him.

Q Ron, did the President, by any chance, see or is he aware of the 60 Minute Show Sunday night on Detroit and the mismanagement and mistakes there of HUD as well as the errors made by probably people in Detroit? I know the President is always praising HUD as being a very well-managed department and I wondered if he saw this.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't ask him. You can ask him this afternoon.

Q Ron, can we return to the FEC just for one minute?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You say that Wiggins has offered a recommendation and that the White House Congressional Liaison people have been in touch with him. Then presumably the President is at least aware of the basic components of this bill as envisioned by the conferees. Can you tell us --

MR. NESSEN: Well, he is aware that some of the people on the Hill think he should sign it and that others think he should veto it.

Q Could you tell us, on the strength of what he has heard, is he at least leaning one way or the other?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he has not made any decision.

Q I am not asking you for a final decision, but is he inclined one way or the other toward the bill?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Is he aware that some people on the Hill are also saying that he has mounted a "starve out Reagan" effort?

MR. NESSEN: That is why I took a little time today, Bob. That is why I said he checked his own record and took a little time today to look at his own record and why I took a little time today to go through his record on the issue.

Q So it is not just that?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely.

Q Ron, on another issue, since the President has given Dr. Kissinger the very strongest possible support in view of criticisms from Governor Reagan and suggestions of early retirement from Messrs. Laird and Morton and since he presumably believes that Dr. Kissinger's forthcoming trip to Africa is very important, I wonder what is the White House reaction to the charge by Field Marshal Amin that Dr. Kissinger is "an arch enemy of free Africa trying to sell a policy of divided rule," and the charge by Bishop Muzuara that the visit is "designed to strengthen imperialism?"

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the quotations and I would like to look at them before reacting.

Q I have just read you the quotations, Ron, and they have been in the papers for two days. Now I just wondered, he is certainly not going to disregard these two top leaders in Africa, is he?

MR. NESSEN: I want to see the quotations. Very often your quotations are not complete as they are read out here in the briefing room.

Q The Washington Star, a usually reliable paper.

MR. NESSEN: Oh, well, that explains it. (Laughter)

Q Straight from the Star.

MR. NESSEN: I will take a look at it.

Q Can I ask a question on the speech this morning?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The President told the DAR, "We are developing a new cruise missile for our air and naval forces." Is he talking about the two thousand mile range cruise?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the details on that, frankly.

Q There is one missile, two ranges: the-five-to-seven hundred range which was one of the alleged SALT bargains and then there was the two thousand mile range. If he is talking about the two thousand mile range, that is fairly significant.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the details of that. Maybe the Pentagon can help.

Q Secondly, in the speech this morning he says, "We are continuing the strategic arms limitation talks." What does the President believe the state of those talks are? Does he believe they are stalled, deadlocked or does he really believe they are indeed continuing?

MR. NESSEN: Well, they are indeed at this stage, Walt, that the Russians have sent in a letter responding -- and I guess I don't know the exact date of the letter, I think the State Department confirmed it shortly after it arrived -- but, anyhow, it arrived about two or three weeks ago, maybe. And the United States is now reviewing that letter and deciding upon what reply to make. So there continues to be exchanges which I think amounts to negotiations on SALT II.

Q Ron, --

MR. NESSEN: Margaret.

Q You have some loose time in this Texas schedule. Is there any significance in the fact that you are going back to Dallas for the second time where you have already had four public appearances, as I recall, plus a press conference, and you have nothing set up in Houston but the press conference?

MR. NESSEN: This is not a complete schedule. This is an outline schedule of the events that are locked in so far, but as the week goes on we will be arranging and announcing other events in various places.

Q Are there more cities to be included in the list?

MR. NESSEN: This is about complete on the cities. It is the events within the cities that are not finalized.

Q There is a thing in Austin with some oil ministers and they seem to think that the President is going to be speaking. Do you know if that is right?

MR. NESSEN: Next week?

Q Yes, I believe so.

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, there are no plans to do that.

Which oil ministers are going to be there?

Q I don't know.

Q There is an energy conference.

MR. NESSEN: I am going to be there myself, but I was not invited to that.

Q Field Marshal Amin is going to be there, Ron.
(Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I will ask him about that quote.

Q Regional news conference in their original context here meant that the White House press would alternate with the local and then subsequently regional news conferences came to be only locally sanctioned.

There will be a regional press conference in Houston. Are we going to be included in that?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is local only, Walt, but I will check it and make sure.

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Q Ron, was the President referring to Ronald Reagan this morning in his speech when he said it was utter and complete nonsense to say --

MR. NESSEN: To say what?

Q -- that the United States -- well, let me put it this way --

MR. NESSEN: No, go ahead and put it that way. I like it when you put it that way because I can answer it that way. (Laughter)

Q In that phrase on the bottom of the first page, was he in fact referring to Ronald Reagan?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to see it myself.

Q I have it right here, Ron.

Q It says -- well, you can read it.

MR. NESSEN: Well, anyone who has said recently that the United States is in a position of military inferiority and that we have accepted Soviet world domination -- anyone who has said that recently is speaking complete and utter nonsense, as the President said.

Q I think Rumsfeld -- didn't he say as much? (Laughter) Wasn't there a TV program where he at least suggested that we may not be number one?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q Am I mistaken in this, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Perhaps. (Laughter)

Q Ron, your answer to the question is yes?

MR. NESSEN: My answer is that anybody who has said that --

Q That includes Zumwalt, right? (Laughter)

Q That is going to include several of the Senators who acknowledged that we may be second in one way but first in others.

MR. NESSEN: I am certainly not going to --

Q Like John McClellan, the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the Senate.

Q Could you name some of the people he was referring to? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: No, I will leave you to that.

Q Field Marshall Amin.

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to elaborate on the thing, Dick.

Q I raise the question because I personally --

MR. NESSEN: I mean, you have files of what people have said and you can compare that to the files of what people have said.

Q If it is such a serious issue and the President is so disturbed about it, why doesn't he choose to identify the people he is talking about?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you will check back the quotes against what various people have said, I think you will come to your conclusion.

Helen asked me a question yesterday, which I have gotten the answer to. I think maybe you have gotten the answer before I have gotten the answer, but she asked, what does the President think of his chances in the next few primary States?

Rog Morton appeared on television this morning and more or less summed up what he has told the President, which is that in Georgia the President feels he will win a good share of the delegates. The President feels he is the underdog in Alabama. The President is very encouraged and believes he will do well in Indiana. The President still feels he is behind in Texas although he is getting closer and still hopes to pull ahead in Texas. I think that takes us up through May 4. That is the next batch of primaries.

Q Is he going to campaign in Alabama at all?

MR. NESSEN: At the moment, there is no plan for a stop in Alabama. That is at the moment. It is possible that something may be arranged later.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 12:53 P.M. EST)

#483