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NEWS CONFERENCE

#493

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:35 A.M. EDT

MAY 17, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think most of you saw the arrival ceremony of Giscard d'Estaing at 10:30, and then the meeting began between the two Presidents at 11 o'clock.

We plan to have a written report on that meeting this afternoon no earlier than 3 o'clock. What we will do is we will have the lunch lid after this briefing and then have a written report for you later in the afternoon, after the lunch lid goes off.

As you know, at 8 o'clock this evening the President and Mrs. Ford will host a white tie dinner for the President and Mrs. Giscard. Sheila Weidenfeld's office is handling the various coverage arrangements for that.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon, the President is going to meet with Vice President Rockefeller and the AID Director, Mr. Parker, to receive a first-hand report from them on their trip to visit the earthquake area in Italy. I think we will have some press coverage at the beginning of that, if you would like. In fact, there is probably no reason why you or the pool, anyhow, shouldn't hear the report that they give to the President. So we will try to set up something like that.

Just to give you a little idea of forthcoming travel, I expect that the President will be visiting the States of Oregon, California and Nevada on Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. We think that we will leave some time in the middle of the morning on Saturday, and I would look for a return very late on the evening of Tuesday, perhaps even over into early Wednesday morning.

I just simply do not have the names of the cities to give you or what order he will visit them in. The advance team only left here at 6 o'clock this morning, and obviously they have not been there, figured out which cities to go to or which events to go to, and we will give you that later in the week.

Q Do you know what the sequence of the States will be, at least?

MR. NESSEN: No.

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Q Don't they all have primaries on the 8th of June?

MR. NESSEN: No. The Oregon and Nevada primaries are earlier than June 8.

Q Why was there a decision not to go to Idaho? Isn't there a primary there?

MR. NESSEN: I think the main reason for the relatively limited amount of travel is that the President just can't get away as much as the full-time candidates are. Obviously, all the others are full-time candidates without any governing responsibilities. The President has the primary responsibility of being President and can only fit in campaign travel where he is able, for a short time at least, to leave the White House. So that is why he is simply not able to get to all of the States.

Q You describe this as limited?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q We can't hear the questions back here.

MR. NESSEN: Phil says, "You describe this as limited?" I said, "Yes." (Laughter)

I think those are all the announcements that I really have.

Q Will there be any whistle-stopping out there?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he will go by train.

Q Is today's meeting the only chance they will have for substantive talks?

MR. NESSEN: There is a second meeting at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Q Ron, on Kissinger's announcement that he would be leaving the Cabinet, has he discussed it at all with the President?

MR. NESSEN: The President knew he would be on the TV show. He did not know what he would say.

Q Does he feel he was left out?

MR. NESSEN: Who is that?

Q Does the President feel he was remiss in announcing it to the world without announcing it to the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what it was exactly that Dr. Kissinger announced. You will have to ask Dr. Kissinger.

Q Do you know whether Kissinger has ever told the President this?

MR. NESSEN: Told the President what?

Q Told the President he plans to leave the Cabinet at the end of the year?

MR. NESSEN: I think you better look at the transcript, Phil, if that is the way you are summarizing what Dr. Kissinger said.

Q One of the things he did say, after saying on the whole he would prefer to leave after November, was that he didn't rule out the possibility that this President, if elected, might make an effort to persuade him to stay on in the second term or in the full term.

Now, if the President is elected --

Q Ron, there is another briefing going on behind us, I think.

MR. NESSEN: The folks in the back who are not interested at all in the briefing might go back to the office area or outside.

Q Kissinger having said that, if the President is elected will he make an effort to persuade Dr. Kissinger to stay on in the new term?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I think the President has spoken out so often in response to that and similar questions as recently as, I suppose, yesterday. I don't really see any need to restate or reiterate his views of Dr. Kissinger. They are clearly on the record.

Q What I am looking for, at least, is an interpretation of what the President has said in light of what Dr. Kissinger now says. What the President has said is that Dr. Kissinger can remain the Secretary of State as long as he wants to. Can we interpret this as meaning in the event if the President is elected he will indeed make an effort to persuade Dr. Kissinger to stay on?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the President has spoken on this subject so often, as recently as yesterday, that I see no reason to add to it.

Q Is there any way to interpret what the President has said other than the way I have stated it?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't pretend to suggest how to interpret for you, Jim. I just say the President has spoken out very frequently and very clearly. He spoke yesterday, as he does almost every day, in response to questions, and I don't see any reason to go any further.

Q One, why was the President surprised? Two, was Dr. Kissinger's statement prompted by anyone in the White House or the political committee?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean by surprised.

Q Exactly. The word "surprise" is not -- if he wasn't informed beforehand --

Q Did the President know Dr. Kissinger was thinking of leaving?

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

Q We can't hear, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Really, we have to get the briefing organized and have one briefing here in the front of the room. Could the folks who are not covering the briefing or interested in it either go to the office area or outside? It is not fair to the American reporters who need whatever small amount of information we have here today.

Q It is negligible, but it is our own. (Laughter)

Q What is your answer to that question? Was he surprised to hear Kissinger say what he said? I didn't hear the answer.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't ask him that question. It didn't come up.

Q Did you ask President Ford anything about the Kissinger appearance?

MR. NESSEN: I think how I run my affairs with the President is my business, Ann. I am answering your questions here as they come along.

Q Answer Helen's second question.

MR. NESSEN: Helen's second question was?

Q Was it prompted by anything?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Has the President discussed Dr. Kissinger's future with Dr. Kissinger at all recently?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, as I say, the President has spoken out so often on this that I don't see any need to add anything today.

Q That was a fairly straightforward question.

MR. NESSEN: That is my fairly straightforward answer, that there is nothing to add today to what has been said publicly by the President.

Q Phil is not asking about what the President said publicly. He is asking a factual news question as to whether the President and Dr. Kissinger have had any discussions recently about Dr. Kissinger's status in the future?

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

Q The purpose of Ann's question is to try to ascertain how much you know about this point and did you discuss it with the President. That is all we really want to know.

MR. NESSEN: I think my record of anticipating questions is pretty good, and I had a hunch there might be one or two items coming up on this today, and I did.

Q The President doesn't feel there is anything remiss about Dr. Kissinger informing the American people on television of his plans without telling him?

MR. NESSEN: The President has spoken out so often, Helen, I see no reason to add anything today.

Q I didn't ask that. I asked about Dr. Kissinger telling the world and not telling him.

Q Ron, as you normally reflect the views of the President, did the President tell you to come out here today and stonewall it? (Laughter)

Q If you don't like the word, did he tell you not to talk about it?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, the President's views on this subject are awfully well-known and I see no need to add anything to it.

Q No, it is a new development in the story. Kissinger has never said publicly before that "I do not intend to stay in this Cabinet beyond January 1."

MR. NESSEN: Did you read the transcript?

Q He said he would prefer not to stay. That is what he said.

MR. NESSEN: I think you really ought to read the transcript.

Q He never said that before, so referring us to the President's old answers is not good enough.

MR. NESSEN: Those are the President's views given almost daily.

Q Do you think politics motivated him at all, the domestic political picture?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, obviously I cannot tell you what was in Dr. Kissinger's mind. You need to get that from him.

Q When you spoke with the President, what did he tell you to tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you that the President's views on Dr. Kissinger are very clear, often stated, and I don't see anything to repeat here.

Q Does the President still believe he would like to have Dr. Kissinger remain as long as he is President?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't have anything to add to what the President has said many times publicly right up through yesterday.

Q If not, you have his view on that, don't you?

MR. NESSEN: The President speaks often on this subject, right up until yesterday, and obviously he has not changed his mind since yesterday.

Q Did you discuss the Kissinger matter with the President this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I think I said twice I anticipated this would come up, Dave, and obviously I talked to the President.

Q Can you tell us how long a discussion you had with him about this?

MR. NESSEN: No, I cannot.

Q Does this make Dr. Kissinger a lame duck Secretary and, therefore, hampered in conducting foreign relations?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably you ought to ask Dr. Kissinger those questions.

Q Was anyone else present when you discussed this with the President?

MR. NESSEN: Dave, I am not going into my morning procedure at the White House.

Q You don't think we are entitled to know that?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q Are you in a position to go so far as to reply to the same question asked another way? Are you in a position to say there has been no change in the President's expressed views?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying that I have nothing to add today to what the President has said publicly before.

Q Or subtract?

MR. NESSEN: Or subtract or multiply or divide, either long or short division.

Q Logarithim? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that stuff. I didn't get that far.

Q What will be your response when Reagan claims credit for Kissinger's scalp? (Laughter)

Q Do you have an answer to that good question?

MR. NESSEN: Obviously, I am not going to anticipate a question that hasn't come up yet.

Q Ron, in terms of the primary tomorrow, win, lose or draw, will the President pull out of the race: I mean, pull out of future primaries?

MR. NESSEN: The President expects to win, so there has been no consideration given to the prospect you suggest. He expects to win in Michigan and expects to do well in Maryland.

Q Several days ago you told a questioner here you would check and see if President Ford had changed his position as President on Rhodesian chrome and on the Panama Canal from when he was in Congress. Have you checked yet?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what his position was on the Panama Canal in Congress. I am not sure if it would have come before him as a Congressman. It was something that began, I guess, in the Administration -- in terms of the negotiations -- under Johnson, continued under Nixon and President Ford.

The Rhodesian chrome question, I think his voting record on that probably is on the record. The position of his Administration is also on the record.

Q Ron, is the President planning some direct contacts with Vorster of South Africa and Smith in Rhodesia?

MR. NESSEN: I think this question, Fran, grows out of an interview the President had on the train with Mr. McGoff of the PANAX newspapers. I forget exactly how the question was worded. The answer was if somewhere down the road it might appear that meetings with various officials in Africa could be helpful, obviously the President would consider them, and so forth. It was a very vague question and vague answer, and it didn't break any new ground or amount to any big announcement.

Q Ron, will there be any transcripts of the perhaps dozen interviews the President gave over the weekend?

MR. NESSEN: There wasn't time for Alderson to do all that, so we will keep the tapes here so if any questions come up, we can check back with the transcripts.

Q There will be no transcripts?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Will he make any phone calls to anyone in Michigan today?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any plans to do that.

Q What about the buying of television time rumor that we couldn't get confirmed last night? Do you know any more about whether he will buy any television time in Michigan tonight?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to check with the PFC. They deal with that.

Q I did, and they couldn't tell us last night, so I thought I would ask today.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. The PFC deals with all that, if there is anything.

Q Ron, what are President Ford's plans tomorrow evening?

MR. NESSEN: He will accept the invitation from the French President to go to the dinner President Giscard is giving and after dinner will return here.

Q Where will you be?

MR. NESSEN: I will be at the dinner, and I will be here, too.

Q Do you have any idea what time that will be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how late the dinner runs, Phil, but whenever it is over, then we will be back here.

Q You don't expect any of your staff people will speak?

MR. NESSEN: Not until we all get back here, no.

Q Ron, on another subject, when the last grain deal was announced with Russia, it was tied up with the oil deal, that they were to be selling us oil. The Commerce Department now says they stopped all negotiations for the oil because it just isn't going to happen. Is the President disappointed at this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall that the grain deal was ever tied to an oil deal. I know negotiations did go on with the Russians about oil. I don't know where it stands now. I know for a long time it appeared the small amount of oil that could be obtained and the fact there was no benefit in price didn't make it very appealing. I don't know where it stands now. Frank Zarb can probably tell you that.

Q It has been stopped. He is not disappointed in that?

MR. NESSEN: There was such a small amount of oil involved and there was no great bargain on price.

Q Was the President impressed with his welcome home ceremony last night?

MR. NESSEN: He was really impressed with the whole trip to Michigan, Aldo, that the crowds were large, friendly and enthusiastic, and he was very pleased at the reception he got.

Q What about the Cabinet turning out?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, you mean that. We had no idea about that until we got on the plane and somebody called and said apparently the wives originated the idea.

Q That wasn't what the President said last night. He thought Red did it.

MR. NESSEN: No, he said there would have been a microphone here if Red had done it.

Q That isn't the way I heard it.

Q Did the wives initiate the calls to the Cabinet members and other high Government officials?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding, that the staff wives and Cabinet wives --

Q I don't know what that was last night, the White House and staff --

MR. NESSEN: There were White House staff people and Cabinet people out to see the President at Andrews. It was something that really was organized by the wives.

Q Ron, does this indicate a more pessimistic mood around here than a lot of us had been aware of? Past visits, past welcomes for Presidents have generally come at low points in their careers.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding was, Aldo -- and we had nothing to do with it and didn't know it was going to happen until we got on the plane -- it was one of the few times or only times, perhaps, when a President returned on a weekend during daylight hours when kids and so forth could get out and see their fathers and so forth, and that was the basic reason.

You know, it was the wives who organized it. What their feeling was, if anything other than come out and see your daddy for a change, I haven't heard of it.

Q I heard the gist of the phone conversation went something like, "The President is depressed and needs cheering up. Please come out to Andrews."

MR. NESSEN: It must be somebody who hasn't seen very much of the President lately.

Q Has the President had any private polls on Michigan?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, no.

Q Just the one I mentioned before by Teether?

MR. NESSEN: The Teether poll, as far as I know, was the old poll.

Q Does the White House have any reaction to the report that came out over the weekend from the Senate Banking Committee on New York City on the loan program problems?

MR. NESSEN: No. As you know, Simon keeps I guess it is a daily or weekly check -- I guess it is a weekly check -- on how they are doing repaying the loan and so forth, and I think each week he has said that the outlook is that he has seen nothing to lead him to believe they will not repay the loan on time.

Q How and why did the President settle on William Springer for the FEC?

MR. NESSEN: He is, as you know, a former Congressman, former commissioner of the Federal Power Commission. I think he is quite well respected. The President feels it is important for Congress to quickly confirm the six members so that they can get back into business and among the other considerations, in addition to the fact he is a very able person, is that the President believes he can and should be quickly confirmed by the Senate.

Q Does this mean the President has accepted the Curtis resignation automatically?

MR. NESSEN: Curtis -- I don't think it was a resignation. It was an indication from former Congressman Curtis that he did not wish to be reappointed.

Q Did Mr. Cook turn down the office?

MR. NESSEN: There was a number of other people considered and Marlo Cook was one of them. He had some problems with, or conflicts--what he felt would be conflicts with his law practice, and therefore decided not to take it.

Q Ron, since Mr. Ford voted to support the Byrd amendment in 1971 while he was in Congress, is there anything that has changed in Africa that caused him to reverse himself on this issue or isn't it true, Ron, that the reason for this change was to curry favor with the Congressional Black Caucus during their White House visit in August of 1974 since this morning Joan Willoughby, who is Mr. Diggs' assistant, said "I think it was pragmatic politics more than anything else. He had a different constituency in Grand Rapids."

MR. NESSEN: Yes or no?

Q I just want to know, do you know anything in Africa that caused the President to enact what could I think, rightfully be called a flip-flop, you know? He used the term with regard to Carter on the Humphrey-Mills bill. He changed spectacularly on this, and I just wondered, was there something in Africa that caused this change or was it simply to curry favor with the Black Caucus?

MR. NESSEN: I think when you asked Bob Funseth the same question on Friday he indicated to you that there had been no -- he gave you, I think, a rather lengthy explanation of what developments in Africa --

Q I have that transcript in my bag, and it was totally irrelevant, and you will note on reading that, Ron, that he referred it right back to you, what we call Press Office ping-pong. Do you know of anything? He said ask Ron Nessen about why the President changed. That was it.

MR. NESSEN: He gave you a review of developments in Africa and --

Q That has nothing to do with the question, Ron. Do you know of anything or is it just pragmatic politics?

MR. NESSEN: He gave you a rundown of a number of developments in Africa relating to the importation of chrome from Rhodesia, and he also gave you a little rundown on how much chrome we import and the need for chrome and so forth and what the likelihood would be of having that chrome supply shut off under certain circumstances.

That is the way I read his answer. It was a fairly lengthy answer, I thought.

Q Ron, the President in the last week or two has made some changes in his campaign style, and in his approach, and I have two questions on that. One, does he feel that this new technique and new emphasis on his record rather than responding to questions and charges is effective?

MR. NESSEN: I would disagree there had been any kind of radical change in his campaign --

Q I didn't say radical, I just said change.

MR. NESSEN: Or even a very minor change. He has always from the very beginning, from the day he announced his candidacy, in fact, that he would campaign on his record and that is what he has been doing.

Q Ron, he has stopped attacking Reagan publicly and he was doing that before.

Q Ron, is President Ford a registered voter in Michigan and has he voted by absentee ballot?

MR. NESSEN: The President and Mrs. Ford are registered voters in Michigan. Both filed their absentee ballots about three weeks ago. I was going to tell you that tomorrow, but I will tell you that today.

The ballot there is really a relatively simple ballot this year. I mean, they are not Senatorial or Governorship or House races.

Q There is no Republican ticket on any race?

MR. NESSEN: There is no ticket, as I am saying --

Q He could cross over. (Laughter)

Q How about this flip-flop on the crossover?
As Morton said, you know, they despised the crossovers
before; now they are appealing for them.

Q There are no Republican candidates?

MR. NESSEN: It is only a Presidential primary.

Q There are no Congressional --

MR. NESSEN: In August. This is a Presidential
primary.

Q Ron, there was a report in the newspaper
this morning about some informal polling that showed
President Ford was ahead in the nose count of some
potential crossover votes left over from the Wallace
strength of 1972. Does President Ford find that surprising
or encouraging?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen the poll, and I
haven't asked him about it, Ann.

Q Ron, has the President assessed the impact
of the train trip? Would he do it again, another whistle
stop?

MR. NESSEN: I think I told some people on
Saturday that he and Mrs. Ford both enjoyed it immensely
as a method or way of campaigning. He felt it enabled
him to be in cities and towns and see people that he
ordinarily would not have been able to reach in as short
a time as that. There are no specific plans for any more
train campaigns, but he did enjoy the day and like it as
a method of campaigning, and so did Mrs. Ford.

The impact of it, I don't have anything
specific other than what I told Aldo, which is he felt
the crowds everywhere in Michigan were larger than he
thought they would be and more enthusiastic than he
thought they would be.

Q On Saturday the Justice Department confirmed
that Attorney General Levi is considering entering the
Boston school segregation court order and try to overturn
it. Your office told us on Saturday here that this is
Levi doing it on his own, that he hasn't talked to the
President about it. Since Levi is apparently going to
make a decision on Wednesday, will the President talk to
the Attorney General about that matter before Wednesday?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he doesn't plan
to.

Q Does he have any attitude about it?

MR. NESSEN: I think he was asked that question over the weekend and said this was a matter that is properly for the Justice Department to handle.

Q Has he been asked by Senator Brooke to talk to Levy about it?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Do you mean to say in a case as controversial as that has been, that the chief law enforcement official of his Administration, that he has not had any discussion with him?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what, Tom, if any intervention there is to be from the Justice Department. I don't think anybody does.

Q But the very fact that they are discussing it, it seems to me would warrant some consideration.

MR. NESSEN: Are they discussing it or is it being discussed in the newspapers? You know, as I said before --

Q The Attorney General's spokesman confirmed that he is going to make a decision on Wednesday.

MR. NESSEN: Okay, but as I have said before here, the matters that are properly the business of the Justice Department, generally speaking in this Administration, have been left to the Justice Department. As I pointed out before, in the past that hasn't always been the case with the results that you know of. This Administration believes in each Cabinet department--not just the Justice Department, but each Cabinet department--handling the matters in its jurisdiction.

Q I am not saying he should dictate to the Justice Department, but I am extremely curious as to why the President would not have enough interest in this case to discuss with his Attorney General acting in behalf of this Administration, a case far-reaching and terribly controversial.

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge they have not talked about it.

Q Why didn't you have enough interest, Ron, to pursue this and ask either the Attorney General or his spokesman? I mean, this is a very important question, Ron.

Q You don't foresee any meeting between them to discuss this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any plans, Helen.

Q There is a big philosophy involved here. It is a very controversial issue, and it should have his stamp on it one way or another.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, I do not know of any contacts or any plans for a meeting.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:03 P.M. EDT)