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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:12 P.M. EDT

JULY 6, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The Queen, as you know, is coming tomorrow. The arrival time is 11:45, and it is just full and open coverage there on the South Lawn. Because of the arrival time, I guess we will pass on our briefing tomorrow. We will post the coverage plans for the dinner tomorrow night.

Later this afternoon -- I think after the lunch break -- we will probably have something for you on the President's decision concerning the public works bill.

Q     What time, about?

MR. NESSEN: I would say not before 3:00 to 3:30, at the very earliest.

Also, I wanted to make you aware of this, even though it is not specifically a White House problem. The President has been informed that a report by Arthur Andersen and Company indicates there could be more welding flaws in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which is being built by a private consortium, than had been found earlier. The President has directed Secretaries Kleppe and Coleman to make a preliminary report to him tomorrow on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline situation.

Q     Why Coleman?

MR. NESSEN: Transportation has a responsibility for the safety of the pipeline.

Q     Can we ask questions on this?

MR. NESSEN: Do you want me to finish the whole thing?

Q     Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The report will be in writing rather than in person.

Q     Tomorrow it is due?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q They got the order today?

MR. NESSEN: No, they got the order previous to that.

Q Who commissioned this?

Q Let him finish the report first.

MR. NESSEN: We have our Alaska Pipeline expert with us.

The report will be in writing, as I said, tomorrow, the preliminary report. Because the Department of Transportation is responsible for pipeline safety, Secretary Coleman, at the President's direction, has instructed his Under Secretary -- that would be the Under Secretary of Transportation -- John Barnum, to head a fact-finding team to Alaska early next week to assess what this may mean in terms of possible delays, any additional costs, and any environmental impact; also, to evaluate new testing procedures and to make recommendations for any possible additional action. The fact-finding team, in addition to the Under Secretary of Transportation, will include representatives of the OMB and the FEA.

Q What is this Arthur Andersen and Company?

MR. NESSEN: Let me try to give you a little background on this. As you know, the pipeline is being built by a private consortium. The Interior Department has a role in overseeing the construction. The Interior Department hired a private company to do the supervision, Mechanics Research, Incorporated. Mechanics Research, Incorporated, hired a private auditor to look into the question of possible improper welds. The private auditor was Bechtel.

MRS. HOPE: When the first problems with the weldings were uncovered, Alaska itself conducted an internal audit and Arthur Andersen was brought in.

MR. NESSEN: Was then brought in by the overseeing company to audit the audit.

Q Has the President ever expressed any opinion on the thought that this is a coverup of imperfect welding? There have been extensive reports that some firms or individuals have actually covered up X-rays showing imperfect weldings.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know anything about that. The fact is, this Arthur Andersen report is not out yet, although it should be out in a day or so, but the President has been advised of --

Q You said you expect the report tomorrow and have a fact-finding next week?

MR. NESSEN: No, I said it was a preliminary report tomorrow, Helen.

Q What is it based on?

MR. NESSEN: Based on the Arthur Andersen report and on other reports.

Q Ron, inasmuch as the Alaska Pipeline is failing to live up to its original promise, both in terms of the energy that it was supposed to deliver -- and if you let me digress for a second, it is well-known when the pipeline reaches its full capacity there is no way to get that oil from Alaska to the Eastern United States or even the Midwestern United States, and indeed that oil will be coming down through Alaska and be sold on the West Coast and to the Japanese. In view of that fact and in view of these imperfections in the welding, is the President giving any consideration to cancelling this project?

MR. NESSEN: This is a private project. I think that ought to be kept in mind both in terms of some of the questions you raise, Walt, and in some of the questions or some of the matters that I have brought up here today. This is a private consortium building that pipeline with permits and oversight from the Federal Government.

Q But it goes across Federal lands and the President of the United States, if he found that there had been criminal errors --

MR. NESSEN: Wait a second. I think you are way ahead of the game on that, Walt. The Government does have certain oversight permit roles and clearly from what I am telling you here is fulfilling that part of it.

Q What does the auditing company have to do with the improper welding?

MR. NESSEN: As Judy said, the company --

Q Can you explain who hired who?

MR. NESSEN: The company that is building the pipeline, the private consortium, goes under the overall name of the Alyeska.

Q Ron, ask her to come up to the microphone so we all can hear her.

MR. NESSEN: I will relay the information to you.

Q Ron, you said earlier there was an indication there were more flaws than had been found earlier. How many had been found earlier?

MR. NESSEN: Here is what I think you ought to do, is to go to the Interior Department because I simply don't have the full background on this. I just want to tell you what steps the President has taken, but the Interior Department and Transportation can give you the factual information, and I don't want to get into an area where I don't know all the facts.

Q Could you give us the organizational setup before we get into the details?

MR. NESSEN: It is a private consortium, the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

Q They represent the consortium?

MR. NESSEN: They are the consortium that is building the pipeline -- seven oil companies. They were required to get certain permits and so forth from the Federal Government, which they did. To oversee and supervise the construction of the pipeline, the Interior Department hired a company named Mechanics Research, Incorporated. To oversee or to fulfill the supervision role of the Interior Department, they hired this company to do that.

Q Is that for environmental problems, or what, Ron? You say that the private consortium is building it. Then you say --

MR. NESSEN: Here is what I think we ought to do. It is silly to ask me questions about a subject I don't know a lot about. The best way to do it is to get in touch with Interior and Transportation --

Q You have an expert here. What is blocking that?

MR. NESSEN: There is nothing blocking it, Helen. The President has taken certain action which I have informed you of today.

Q Can you explain about Andersen?

Q Just continue telling us what you do know.

MR. NESSEN: You have the consortium building the pipeline, whose name I have given you. You have the private firm hired by the Interior Department to do supervision. Now, when there were some questions raised about some of the welds on the pipeline, the consortium building the pipeline did an analysis of that and then the Andersen Company was hired by Mechanics Research, Incorporated. Andersen was hired to so to speak audit Alyeska's own survey of the welds and Andersen is about to publish that report or turn in that report in the next day or so. So, that is the setup.

Q How did the President get this information, and what was his reaction to it?

MR. NESSEN: The information that the Andersen Company had found, there could possibly be more welding flaws than originally indicated was passed on to him by the Domestic Council last week and his reaction to it is what I have told you today, which is giving certain directions to Kleppe and Coleman.

Q Was he concerned, distressed, angry, perturbed, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Well, he has taken the action here, Jim.

Q Ron, obviously a bunch of oil companies that want to sell oil are not going to just go and build a pipeline that is going to burst every five minutes or every few miles. There must be more to this than that.

MR. NESSEN: That is why I say first you should talk to Interior and Transportation.

Q Was the President visited by any delegations from the environmental groups? Has he talked to anybody representing environmental groups?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, no.

Q Ron, is this because the report is not yet ready?

MR. NESSEN: Valdez is not ready. There is no question about that, but it is somewhat unrelated to this.

Q How long is the pipeline?

Q Who at Interior should be called?

MR. NESSEN: The Public Affairs Office in both departments can put you in touch with their pipeline people.

Q Ron, who is she?

MR. NESSEN: I think you all know Judy Hope from the Domestic Council.

Q Ron, you described her as an expert. Can she give us some basic information?

MR. NESSEN: No. I think you should get it from the departments involved. They do have the responsibility for overseeing the pipeline.

Q Ron, how does this line up with the criticism leveled in the days of fighting over the pipeline by the ecology forces?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to talk to Interior and Transportation.

Q Ron, the only thing you have told us is there are more flaws than were earlier thought.

MR. NESSEN: No, I haven't. I said the President has been informed that a report indicates there could be.

Q Does the report indicate that the earlier audit that was done for Alyeska covered up some of these possibilities?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the Andersen report. In fact, it is not out yet, but the Andersen report is a report to the Interior Department and they would be able to help you.

Q Ron, has the Anderson report made any recommendation to the Interior Department or to the Government as a whole as to what should be done?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the Andersen report.

Q This word was passed along by the Domestic Council last week. Did that report seem to include a relaying of any recommendations?

MR. NESSEN: He is getting a preliminary report tomorrow from the two Secretaries involved.

Q Ron, if they uncover a lot of flaws, will the public's money be involved in fixing them?

MR. NESSEN: I don't see how public money could be involved in fixing them. This is a private project.

Q Could I ask, also, how critical this situation is? You say more flaws could be found. Apparently the President has a lot more details than we are getting here.

MR. NESSEN: And you can get a lot more details, yourself, Walt, at Interior.

Q In a word, then, may I ask if there is a critical situation along the construction route of that pipeline? How serious is it, please?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the Andersen report, and you need to get the fuller details from Interior and Transportation.

Q You don't know what the President has been told?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the full report that the President has been given.

Q Could you characterize it for us, as to how serious a situation it is, please? It has come to the President's desk and that suggests a rather serious situation.

MR. NESSEN: The White House does not have a specific role in this. As I say, it is a private consortium, but there is Interior and Transportation oversight of aspects of it and they are obviously fulfilling their job, but the President has been informed of it.

Q Ron, it sounds like a very serious problem has developed. Is that the case?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I have not heard anybody use that expression. I think you ought to check with Interior, to whom the Andersen report is being made, and Transportation, which has the oversight for the safety of the pipeline.

Q Is the Interior Department going to make it public?

MR. NESSEN: You have to check with them, Helen.

Q What some people are getting at is, does the President mean to suggest by taking those actions that he considers the problem serious?

MR. NESSEN: I think you ought to stick to the language of what I have said, which is that he has given certain directions to the Cabinet departments which have responsibility for the pipeline.

Q Was the Alyeska report filed with the Interior Department or with Transportation?

MR. NESSEN: Judy, did Alyeska's own report on the welds get sent in to the Government?

MRS. HOPE: Alyeska's own report was made available to the Alaskan Pipeline Office, which is the Department of Interior.

MR. NESSEN: Interior is the place to get all that.

Q If the White House has no role in all this, why is the President assuming a role?

MR. NESSEN: He is not really assuming a role, I would not say. He has given directions to the Cabinet members. He is getting a report tomorrow from the Cabinet members involved and then he has directed Coleman to send this team up to gather more facts.

Q Would they not have done that as a matter of course?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I assume they would have.

Q Two questions. First, when did the President specifically learn of this situation?

MR. NESSEN: Last week.

Q Secondly, when you were telling what the fact-finding team is going to do, the very last thing you mentioned seemed to leave the way open for you. Did you say --

MR. NESSEN: I said make recommendations for further action.

Q For further action. Could that possibly involve the Justice Department coming in?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to speculate on anything like that.

Q Ron, what is the prognosis as far as the number of years or months this will set back the pipeline?

MR. NESSEN: One of the subjects that the fact-finding team is going to look into, Bob, is any possible delay in the completion of the pipeline.

Q Is it possible, because of these developments -- which you say you don't know the gravity of -- that the wisdom of building that pipeline, which has always been questioned, that they would rethink the pipeline itself, that this Administration would rethink the decision to build the pipeline?

MR. NESSEN: It was not a decision of this Administration to build the pipeline. It was a decision of a private consortium to build the pipeline, which they then were required to get certain permits and permissions for, which they have.

Q I understand that, but you understand this Administration does have the power to review the decision of a previous Administration. My question is, is this Administration approaching the point where it may rethink the decision relative to the wisdom of building the pipeline itself?

MR. NESSEN: I think rather than speculating and dealing with hypothetical possibilities, I will stick to what has actually happened.

Q How long will the study go on?

MR. NESSEN: The Andersen study?



Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The Andersen study did not, as I understand it, go out and do original research. Andersen's study was, in fact, an audit of the consortium's own study of the welding problem.

Q Could you tell us what the alternatives are? Obviously one of them is revoking the permits. That would be the most extreme. What are the others?

MR. NESSEN: Walt, why do you want to race ahead so far? The President has taken certain action, the fact-finding team has gone, I have given you the objectives of the fact-finding team, and I just can't carry it as far ahead as you would like to.

Q I said that was the most extreme. Could you give us some more temperate possibilities?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to stick with what has happened and what is going to happen.

Q Could Judy give us some very basic details?

MR. NESSEN: I think the place to go is the Interior Department and the Transportation Department.

Q You are announcing this now and some of us have to file it now. I meant in terms of how long the pipeline is supposed to be, where it starts and where it ends, and when it is scheduled to be completed.

MR. NESSEN: For those of you who need that, Judy can talk to you after the briefing.

Q Would it be fair to say the Andersen audit of the original report raised enough doubt about the validity of the original report to require an on-the-spot inspection by these two Government agencies, ordered by the President?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to go that far.

Q Ron, is this Andersen report going to be made public?

MR. NESSEN: You have to check with Interior. It is to them.

Judy can tell you a little about what the preliminary draft of the Andersen report has already made public.

Q Would you give us the pleasure of giving this lady's full name?

MRS. HOPE: My name is Judy Hope.

Q And you are with the Domestic Council?

MRS. HOPE: Yes.

Q A staffer on the Domestic Council?

MRS. HOPE: Yes, and I am not an expert.

Q What is your title there? What is your background?

MRS. HOPE: I am Associate Director of the Domestic Council and I am a lawyer.

Q Tell us about the preliminary draft.

MRS. HOPE: The preliminary draft was presented by Arthur Andersen last Thursday.

Q To whom?

MRS. HOPE: To the Department of Interior. The Department of Transportation was in attendance at that time. I don't know who presented it on the Hill on Friday, the preliminary draft.

Q Where on the Hill?

MRS. HOPE: I believe it was the House Interior Committee.

Q In public session?

MRS. HOPE: Yes, sir, as far as I know.

Q So, we can get a copy of this?

MRS. HOPE: I would presume so, but I do not know. That is a matter for Congress. I don't know how that works. But, that is a draft report and the final report will be available today or tomorrow from Arthur Andersen.

Q When does the President get this? Wednesday, also?

MRS. HOPE: Presumably Thursday.

Q Have you read the report?

MRS. HOPE: No, I have not.

Q How long is the pipeline?

Q Do you have that basic information?

MRS. HOPE: No. One thing I do know -- someone asked how many welds -- the internal audit showed there were 3,955 welds that were questionable.

Q Who reported that?

MRS. HOPE: That was the Alyeska report.

Q Out of how many welds altogether?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know.

Q Over how long a distance?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know.

MR. NESSEN: These are questions that really belong at Interior, Walt.

Q What is the Andersen figure compared to that?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know.

MR. NESSEN: We are not going to give out the Andersen figure here because we don't have it.

MRS. HOPE: I have not seen the Andersen report, so I don't know.

Q Did this preliminary draft have a figure in it, the draft that was released Friday?

MRS. HOPE: I believe it did, but I don't know that figure.

Q The Alyeska company has filed a report with the Government agency showing there were about 3,955 questionable welds?

MRS. HOPE: That is correct.

Q If the Andersen report shows there are more, would the Alyeska people be liable for criminal prosecution?

MR. NESSEN: That is not a question we can answer here.

MRS. HOPE: I am a lawyer, and I can't answer that question.

Q Are the Teamsters involved in this?

MRS. HOPE: I have no idea.

Q Who is doing the work on it?

MR. NESSEN: We can't answer those questions from here, Helen. We don't run the pipeline from here. The Interior Department --

MRS. HOPE: The way it was set up was Alyeska is building the pipeline. They are building it across Federal land. They completed a contract with the Department of Interior in 1974, which had very stringent environmental and safety conditions in it. Contrary to the usual practice, where only 10 percent of pipeline welds are normally radiographed, there was a condition in this 1974 contract requiring that 100 percent of the welds would be radiographed to insure there would not be any corrosion, any leakage, any explosion, any damage to the permafrost, any damage to the tundra or the flora or the caribou. They were very concerned about this, and these were the tightest standards that ever have been put on any pipeline in the history of the United States.

Q Is that X-ray?

MRS. HOPE: Radiograph is sort of like an X-ray, as I understand it. Now, in conjunction with this contract, the Department of Interior set up an office -- I believe in Anchorage -- called the Alaska Pipeline Office, to be sure that the pipeline construction was done to these very stringent standards.

Q Who is head of that office?

MRS. HOPE: A man named Mr. Rawlings.

Q Could I ask, you said you saw the initial Andersen report and there was indeed a figure in there, but you don't remember what the figure was?

MRS. HOPE: I did not see the original Andersen report. You misunderstood me.

Q The draft report?

MRS. HOPE: I have not seen the draft report.

Q Would you be able to characterize whether the number of imperfect welds in the Andersen report-- or what you know of the Andersen report--is considerably greater than the 3,955?

MR. NESSEN: How can she say if she didn't read it, Walt, or see it?

Q I asked her a question. Can you say whether it is greater than the initial --

MR. NESSEN: Take a wild guess, since you didn't see the report.

Q Ron, please don't ridicule my questions. You don't have that right.

Q Can she answer the question, please?

Q It is a legitimate question, and if she can't answer it, let her just say, "No, I can't tell you."

MRS. HOPE: I think Ron said that originally. He said it was believed in the Andersen report that more are questionable than was originally thought. Yes, that is the reason that we are talking about this.

Q In other words, I am trying to determine the gravity of the situation.

MRS. HOPE: So are we.

Q Isn't that in the preliminary report? The President has taken an action. Presumably he has taken it based on knowledge. That, we hope. The knowledge would be there is a problem connected with the welding beyond the problem that we originally knew about. What is the scope of the problem that the President is now acting on?

MR. NESSEN: I said that he was informed last week, on the basis of the Andersen report, that there could be more welding flaws in the pipeline than had been found in the earlier audit by the people who are building the pipeline.

Q How many more? Can we quantify this?

MR. NESSEN: Judy has not seen the report, and I have not, either, but the report is available publicly, Bob, and you can get that exact number either out of the data introduced on the Hill last week or from the Andersen company or Interior directly.

Q But the President has seen it, right?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but I don't know what the number is myself.

Q How long is this pipeline and where does it run from and to, please?

MRS. HOPE: I don't have that information.

Q How does this square with the advance predictions of the ecologists?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know what advanced predictions of ecologists you are talking about.

Q They were saying the pipeline is going to leak, it is going to affect the tundra, it is going to affect wildlife, and they fought a hard battle against it.

MRS. HOPE: We don't know that yet. What we are trying to do -- it is for sure there will be no material flowing through that pipeline until all of these welds are okay. The testing procedures are a method by which the pipeline can be radiographed from inside the pipeline rather than digging everything up and looking at them specifically and those testing procedures are what is being finalized this week.

There was a question earlier as to why nobody is going until next week and the reason is the testing procedures will not be in place until the beginning of next week and the minute they are, John Barnum is taking a group up and they are going to inspect on site.

Q This applies to the overground as well as the underground?

MRS. HOPE: That is right, but there is a lot of it that is under river now and so forth, but in terms of the ecologists predictions, as I understand, the reason such enormous care is being taken is so there will be no chance that those predictions will come true. No chance.

Q Haven't they moved some salt water through?

MRS. HOPE: No oil; no petroleum products.

Q Is it statutory that no oil -- does the law say no oil can move through until all the welds are perfect?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know because I have not read that portion of the law, but I know that that is the policy which has been absolutely set.

Q Judy, do you have any idea when the oil is scheduled to start?

MRS. HOPE: No, I don't.

MR. NESSEN: Valdez will not be completed for at least another year. That is the terminal, so it could not move for at least another year.

Q I am still mystified as to why the President has become involved in this whole process. It is a private consortium, and the White House has technically nothing to do with the project.

MR. NESSEN: It is a project which involves, first of all, pipeline crossing Federal land, as Judy said, and the private consortium having signed and made certain agreements with the Federal Government and the Interior and the Transportation Departments having certain oversight responsibility to make sure the pipeline is built in conformity with that and the Domestic Council, which sort of coordinates domestic programs, brought this to the President's attention.

Q Was he concerned? Is that why he became involved?

MR. NESSEN: Again, I don't want to use a word because he has taken specific action which I think indicates his reaction to the report that he has been given by the Domestic Council.

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Q Could you, for our benefit, indicate in your own words, characterize why he decided to take that action?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I just indicated that he was told that the Anderson report indicated there could be more welding flaws than had been indicated earlier.

Q Without jumping the fence on the fact-finding report, is there any speculative reason why this has happened?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you that from here. I think you would have to --

Q Why are there so many flaws? What has happened? Inferior materials, or what?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think we can give that kind of appraisal from here, Helen.

Q Ron, the Interior Department has the power and the authority under already set regulations, and so on, in the Administration, to do virtually everything that the President has ordered done with exception of bringing the Transportation Department in. Does the fact that the President has moved into the situation imply there has been any conflict on what to do about this, either in the Interior or between Interior and Transportation?

MR. NESSEN: None that I know of. I don't know of anything like that.

Q Ron, we have had a lot of pipelines built in this world and I guess most of them have been built by the people in the United States. As far as I know, this is, I believe, the first time the White House has undertaken to supervise the building of a pipeline. Why doesn't the President leave this to Interior and Transportation?

MR. NESSEN: That is exactly what he is doing.

Q But he has a team going from OMB. Why all that? They don't know anything about pipelines. Lynn's office doesn't know anything about pipelines. Why don't they leave it to the experts?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly, Frank Zarb has an interest in it and indicated he would like somebody from his office to go, and OMB does have an interest in it in the sense that they oversee legislation.

Q Ron, this is the first time in history that the White House has undertaken to get itself involved in the construction of a pipeline, right?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.



Q I will bet you a dollar.

MR. NESSEN: But the fact is, the White House is not thrusting itself in or taking over the supervision of it. The oversight responsibility remains with Interior and Transportation.

Q Is the 4 o'clock meeting that the President is having with Zarb connected with this at all?

MR. NESSEN: No, this is a once delayed meeting with Frank that was originally supposed to be held last week, in which Frank is reporting on his recent trip to the Middle East.

Q Are there any penalties, Ron, if the stringent safety standards are not met that you talked about?

MR. NESSEN: That is something the Interior Department can tell you.

Q Does Mrs. Hope know here, if there are penalties?

MRS. HOPE: I would concur with what he said; the Interior Department is the knowledgeable one.

Q Is there anybody that could give us a figure --

MR. NESSEN: I would get in touch with the Public Affairs Office and let them steer you to the right person.

Q Are they announcing anything -- either Interior or Transportation -- in this regard?

MR. NESSEN: They will have the same information I have given you here in terms of the general statement. They will obviously have a lot more details.

Q Have they already made that available?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I assume they have.

Q Will we be given the interim report, the preliminary report tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Not from here. Certainly if it is available it would come out of either Interior or the Arthur Andersen Company, or if it has been made public on the Hill already I would guess it is available there now.

Q No, I mean the report from the Cabinet officers.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. The written report that he is going to receive from Coleman and Kleppe?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Let me check. I did not check that, Dick.

Q I am confused on one thing Judy said. She said some of the testing equipment won't be in place until next week, inside the pipeline.

MRS. HOPE: It is a new testing procedure which is now just being developed. And it won't be --

Q This is in addition to radiographs?

MRS. HOPE: It is an additional new testing procedure which is just in the final stages of development as a result of these audits.

Q Are you describing the radiograph?

MRS. HOPE: It is a new kind of X-ray.

Q You mean the radiograph is a new kind?

MRS. HOPE: It is in addition to the regular testing procedure.

Q Who put that in? The company itself?

MRS. HOPE: I don't know.

Q Ron, any other announcements today?

MR. NESSEN: Some people have asked me in the past couple of days -- or this morning and yesterday -- what the President thought of this whole weekend, and I asked him this morning. He said that from his own participation and from reading in the press and watching on television the July 4th weekend, he sensed that "the spirit of the American people in this 200th birthday was one of national unity, friendliness toward others and pride in America."

It seems to the President that Americans are raising their sights from some of the troubles of the recent past and are looking with real enthusiasm toward the adventure of our next 100 years. That is in response to some questions I have had.

Q Ron, in connection with this, one of the 10 American citizen hostages who were rescued by the Israelis in Uganda is Mr. George Garfinkel of New York who is quoted as saying in Tel Aviv, "Our Government didn't care about us. The Israeli Government did. The American Government did not give a damn about us. The Israelis freed us."

Question: Presuming that the White House would not try to brush off such a statement by an American citizen who faced death for a week, what is the White House response to Mr. Garfinkel?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think you know the telegram that the President sent to Prime Minister Rabin expressing satisfaction --

Q That was not my question, Ron. My question is to Garfinkel.

MR. NESSEN: -- that the passengers had been saved and terrorism had been thwarted and, secondly, as was said throughout the period when the passengers were held hostage, the United States was in touch with all the Governments involved attempting to work out the release of the passengers.

Q If the President expressed satisfaction in a very heroic and daring military activity by the Israeli Government, why is it that we did not do the same thing for our citizens, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I can take on a hypothetical question like that.

Q Ron, does the United States have any information on the role of President Amin and the Ugandans in this event? There is somewhat of a controversy as to whether or not the Ugandans spelled the hijackers and whether or not President Amin was cooperating with them.

MR. NESSEN: We don't have the details of that period, when you are talking about, Dick.

Q Could you look ahead until next week and tell us if the President is planning any travel during this period of the Democratic Convention or can you give us any overall view of what the President's plans are during that time frame?

MR. NESSEN: That starts next week?

Q Why don't we start this week?

MR. NESSEN: This week's activities are primarily taken up with the visit of the Queen. Then, over the weekend, I think you know, on Saturday the President goes to Newport, Rhode Island to take part in an additional event for the Queen. I don't have the details of that yet. I will have them later in the week.

Q Doesn't he go somewhere else?

MR. NESSEN: Possibly, but it has not been really arranged yet.

Q Can I get back to the hijacking question? We were leaving it and I have a question I want to ask. In view of the considerable effort the United States has gone through and in view of the policy change toward the African countries toward self-determination and all of that, what is the position now of the United States in response to the OAU countries' complaints that this has been aggression and violation of air space? What is the position of the United States in view of that?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that it is not at all clear that the OAU is going to take up such a resolution, so I just don't see how I can speculate about a resolution that the OAU may not even take up.

Q A number of African countries have already expressed that viewpoint.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, as far as we know, it has not been decided whether there will be such a resolution at the OAU.

Q Does the United States, does the President, regard this as Israel in any way violating the rights of Uganda?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am going to stand on the President's telegram to Prime Minister Rabin, which I think is self-explanatory, and not go beyond it.

Q Did the President send a subsequent and more extensive letter to Rabin?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge.

Q Would you tell us about the travel?

Q Also, next week.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, this afternoon we are very likely going to have something on the public works bill. Tomorrow the Queen arrives, and there are several days of events involving the Queen, although there will be other business here.

As you know, Congress sent a fair number of bills up here in the last days, so those will have to be reviewed and signed or vetoed.

Then over the weekend, on Saturday the President goes to Newport for an event with the Queen, and I will have the details of that later.

Then next week, the President will be here just minding the store. Then we have already announced the President will go to the Connecticut State Convention on Saturday the 17th, and I would anticipate that there would be a fairly early morning departure from here and back early in the afternoon.

Q Any plans for a press conference next week?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything specific right now.

Q Ron, has he had any time for calling delegates in the last several days?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I have not heard of any.

Q Are you not reporting that when he does?

MR. NESSEN: It is just I have not heard of any.

Q That is since Puerto Rico. You have not heard of any since then?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any, but I have not made any great effort to find out.

Q When you say "minding the store," can we assume it is going to be a fairly quiet week as far as the President is concerned while the Democrats are holding their convention in New York?

MR. NESSEN: Quiet or noisy, it is unrelated.

Q Will he be watching television? Will he be watching events of the Democratic Convention?

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

Q Certainly he will be following it.

MR. NESSEN: I would think so.

Q To follow Bob's question here, when asked to comment on the Israeli rescue mission, Ronald Reagan made the statement, "This is what Americans used to do." Would the President disagree or agree with that?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President's views on the rescue operation were stated in his telegram to Prime Minister Rabin.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:55 P.M. EDT)