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NEWS CONFERENCE

#543

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:37 A.M. EDT

JULY 26, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: You have seen the signing ceremony for the Coastal Zone Management Act.

The President plans to monitor the evacuation of additional Americans, and others, from Beirut tonight.

Q What do you mean by "monitor"?

MR. NESSEN: It means he will keep up with the evacuation and make whatever decisions he needs to make.

Q Where will you keep relaying information to him?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure where he will be monitoring it from.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that it is supposed to get going at about 2:00 A.M.. I was going to come back in here and have a very small staff in the Press Office.

Q 2:00 A.M. our time?

Q You are coming down here at 2:00 A.M.?

MR. NESSEN: I always do, Mort. I will probably be back here about midnight or 12:30. Bill Greener will be running a more extensive press operation at the Pentagon. He will be putting out a lot more detail. We will, obviously, be duplicating any major announcements that need to be made, if any.

Q Could you back up one second? You said you were not sure where the President planned to monitor it. Did you mean to suggest he might not monitor it at the White House?

MR. NESSEN: No, I mean he could be up in the Residence, in the NSC office, in the Sit Room, or wherever. I am not sure precisely where.

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Q This is the first time anything like this has been done of the President monitoring anything like this, isn't it?

MR. NESSEN: Not since the last time we had an evacuation from Beirut, which was June 20th.

Q Why do this at all?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean?

Q You usually monitor something like the MAYAGUEZ, or something like that, but why this?

MR. NESSEN: It involves elements of the Sixth Fleet, Sarah. Although everyone hopes and anticipates that it will go smoothly, there could be the need for a Presidential decision during the night.

Q Do you know something that you are not telling us?

MR. NESSEN: No. Well, maybe, but not on this issue.

Q Will it be done the same way as the previous one?

MR. NESSEN: You mean as far as the ship coming in and picking up the --

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it will be.

Q I am not sure of the accuracy of the occasion, but former President Nixon did this once and he actually sat and had radio contact with the man from the Sontay prison raid. Will the President have any radio contact with the convoy as it leaves Lebanon?

MR. NESSEN: It is not a convoy. It is a ship. If it is done the way the previous evacuation was done, the President did not personally talk directly to the ships, but people at the Pentagon did and the message was relayed to the President in a phone call either between the President and Don Rumsfeld or Don Rumsfeld to Brent Scowcroft, who, in turn, informed the President.

Q Is this being done under the aegis of the PLO again?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what you mean, the aegis of the PLO.

Q They conducted a protective operation through arrangement with the U.S. Government in the last evacuation, didn't they?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as we indicated before, the various parties involved in maintaining security along the roadway indicated that the general security situation was not safe for a road convoy, so the decision was made to go by sea as the safest way.

Q How many people will be going?

MR. NESSEN: We don't know exactly until they actually show up to go on the boat, but on the basis of registration, as of last week, it looks like somewhere between 400 and 500. Of that total, approximately 160 would be Americans.

Q Are these all from the Embassy, American personnel?

MR. NESSEN: The number of people from the Embassy would be -- roughly about 28 people from the Embassy would be going out and the rest would be American civilians, Lebanese-Americans, and others.

Q How many Americans live in the Embassy?

MR. NESSEN: Approximately 15.

Q Ron, what was your answer to Phil's question?

MR. NESSEN: I forgot the question.

Q The question is, is the PLO going to have a prominent role in managing the evacuation, as they did in the last one?

MR. NESSEN: I don't agree that the PLO had a prominent role in managing the last one, but the United States has been in contact with the various parties in Lebanon and one of the things they have been in contact about is facilitating the evacuation. I would say it would be fair to say all the parties have extended their full cooperation to facilitate the departure.

Q "All parties" does include the PLO?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you check back and look at Fred Brown's briefing at the State Department on Friday, he was asked that question and outlined exactly what contacts there had been.

Q Do you have the name of the main transport vessel?

MR. NESSEN: You mean the LST that lays off-shore? I don't have the names of either of the vessels involved.

Q We don't know, then, whether it will be the one that conducted the evacuation in June?

MR. NESSEN: No, we don't, but Bill Greener is gearing up for tonight and will be able to provide you with that information.

Q Should we look for a surprise appearance by the President in the press room about 5:00 or 5:30 in the morning?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I didn't look for the last one, but he did it.

I think some of you know the new recording number of our recording machines in the Press Office that we use to try to provide you with routine information, schedule notifications and so forth, was published again. It was published once, as you know, in the National Enquirer about a couple of weeks ago and we changed the number because once it had been published, there were so many phone calls from curiosity seekers that you could not get your own calls in.

The number was published again yesterday in Parade Magazine, so we are going to change the number one more time and the number, starting at 1:00 today, for the Press Office recording phones is 456-2343, and the second machine has the number 456-2344. If you recall back, we put these in for the convenience of reporters and to ease up some of the load on the secretaries in the Press Office, so you could call and in a quick and simple way, get routine announcements and schedules, and so forth.

I don't think we can change the number every month like this, or every few weeks when people publish the number and I don't know, really, why the number is published.

You might want to ask Lloyd Schearer why he did publish it.

Q What is his number?

MR. NESSEN: His phone number is 213 --

Q Is this his home phone number, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is. 213-472-1011, and if he has gone into the office, you can reach him at 213-OL 3-2073. So, if you care to find out what was the purpose of publishing it, call him at either of those numbers.

Q What time do you suggest, Ron, 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning?

Q Can we call during the evacuation?

Q Did you call yourself and indicate your displeasure that this was run because the way it was worded, they made it sound like it was a thing for tourists. Was it a misunderstanding?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't know why Lloyd published it.

Q Did you ask him?

MR. NESSEN: I have not talked to Lloyd.

Q You know, Ron, to write this story, which we obviously have to, we have to publish the new number.

MR. NESSEN: It was done in good spirit.

Helen, go ahead. The phones are there for your convenience, not ours. If you publish the numbers and they are jammed with folks calling out of curiosity, it doesn't hurt the Press Office, Helen, It hurts the reporters, it seems to me, who I think have found these --

Q It puts a different light on it.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, we have changed the number again to keep the lines free for press calls. If the numbers are published again, I don't see how we can keep changing the number every few weeks.

MORE

Q Ron, what about the intruder last night?

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish my announcements and we will get to the intruder last night.

You will be happy to know that through the valiant efforts of Ray Zook we are going to be able to take care of about 50 reporters with rooms in the hotel where the President is staying in Kansas City; namely, the Crown Center. It is 25 rooms, actually, and everybody will have to double up, and we are going to have to limit this to the regulars who normally travel with us.

If your organization already has obtained accommodations or single accommodations, you might want to stick with those, but these rooms are available.

After the briefing Ray Zook is going to come here and take down the necessary information. There are special reservation blanks for this hotel and for these rooms, and he will give these to you and they will have to be returned with a deposit in a very short time, which Ray will explain to you.

Ray says that it would help him if you could make up your own pairs since there is only one reservation blank for each room. There will be no moral judgments made from this podium.

Q Ron, what period will this be for?

MR. NESSEN: This is basically a five-day room reservation, John, but that should not be taken to mean that the President will be there for five days, but that is the minimum amount of time for which you can rent these rooms.

Q From what date to what date, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you wait until Ray gets out here and let him give you the full details of it.

Q That is a 15-minute bus ride from the Crown Center to the arena?

MR. NESSEN: About.

Now, Dick's question.

Last night the President was reading papers in the Residence at the time of the incident. He was called by the Secret Service, who asked whether he had heard anything. The President said no.

Q What time was that?

MR. NESSEN: About 9:30. They gave him a brief report on developments to that point and the President said, "I would like to have a full report." About 30 minutes later -- in other words, roughly 10:00 or so -- Dick Keiser called the President and did give him a full report of events up to that point.

Keiser called back later in the evening and told the President that the man had died in the hospital. The President will get a written report on the entire incident.

Q He had been shot before the first call, obviously?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Who will give him the report?

MR. NESSEN: The investigation is actually being made by the Metropolitan Police Department, as well as the Executive Protective Service, and I have a name and a phone number at the Metropolitan Police Department of a man who is handling press inquiries on this. His name is Sergeant Sharkey.

Q It is not a he, it is a she, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Is it?

Q No, it is a he, and he is probably drowning in inquiries with everybody putting his name out.

Q What is his phone number?

MR. NESSEN: 626-2726.

Q Ron, how close to the mansion was this man when he was shot?

MR. NESSEN: Ed, I don't have any of the details of the episode, and if I did, I don't think it would be proper for me to put them out. I would say call Jack Warner at the Secret Service or Sergeant Sharkey at the Metropolitan Police for the specifics of what happened.

Q Ron, does the President have a view on the use of firearms in this case and whether it was really necessary to shoot a man who apparently was armed with only a lead pipe?

MR. NESSEN: At this point, knowing only from brief telephone reports of the episode, the President, as he understands the episode, has been told that the man was warned three times to stop, that the man appeared to threaten the police officer with a three-foot length of pipe, that that could have been a bomb, that the policeman had a responsibility to protect the White House and the President and that the policeman did his duty in accordance with his best judgment, and the President has not seen in the reports he has received so far any sign that the policeman over-reacted.

Q Was a warning shot fired?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Where was Mrs. Ford at the time?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't ask, but I can.

Q Ron, you keep referring to policemen. It is the Executive Protection Service, isn't it, Federal officers?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Could you give us his name? Is he on administrative leave pending this investigation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, but Jack Warner or Sergeant Sharkey can give you that.

Q Is it known how much apart they were when the shot was fired?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't know those details, Bob. Jack Warner can give you that.

Q Ron, where did his bullet hit the man?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, I don't know and I don't think I ought to be giving out those kinds of details of the episode. Sergeant Sharkey or Jack Warner can give you that.

Q How come you don't know the details that have been provided to the media and have been in the papers and on the wires?

MR. NESSEN: The proper place to get those is from the Secret Service and Sergeant Sharkey.

Q That is not the point. You say the President was given a report from Keiser last night. Presumably, you are at least basically familiar with what has occurred and it strikes me you are just passing this off to other people. If that is the point, why don't you just say that instead of saying you don't know the details? Don't you even know the basic information on this case?

MR. NESSEN: I know some of the basic information, Dick, but the proper place to have it come out is from the Secret Service and from the Metropolitan Police.

Q You say the President does not feel the policeman over-reacted?

MR. NESSEN: Based on what he knows now.

Q Doesn't the President think, for example, he might have shot him in the leg or somewhere where he might not have been killed?

MR. NESSEN: I have given you the President's view.

Q Ron, was there any initial reaction to either the first phone call or the second phone call -- was there any concern at that point on his part for his own safety or Mrs. Ford's?

MR. NESSEN: I think at the time of the first phone call the episode had already been completed and the President had not been aware of it through sound or anything else.

Q He did not hear the gunshot?

MR. NESSEN: He did not, no.

Q How many such incidents have there been of penetration of the White House grounds so far this year?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Phil, but Jack Warner can tell you.

Q Ron, can you tell us what the President's reaction was to Keiser's two phone calls?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, his reaction?

Q Did he have comment to Keiser. Did he say anything about the fact that the intruder was killed?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what his reaction was during the phone call with Dick Keiser -- two phone calls -- but I am telling you what his reaction was to one of the suggestions that was made here.

Q Does he not have any reaction to the fact that the man is dead?

MR. NESSEN: I think I gave you his reaction, Dick.

Q You gave us a reaction, I think, the fact that he does not think the policeman over-reacted. Is he not sorry that the man died?

MR. NESSEN: I think your question answers itself, Dick.

Q I don't think so.

MR. NESSEN: The President, I think, has a record of deploring any kind of violence and of --

Q Then let us hear what the reaction was here. If he does, let us hear what it was this time.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any specific reaction to that particular question.

Q Did he say anything about "Please hurry and get the man to the hospital. How is he?" Or, did he call the hospital to ask about the man or anything?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have probably given you a pretty complete chronology of the evening.

Q Ron, is any consideration being given to make it more difficult to scale the fence?

MR. NESSEN: Any change in security precautions -- any information about that would come from the Secret Service. The President does believe the security provided by the Secret Service and EPS is adequate.

Q Ron, if I might follow that up, when the intruder came through the Northwest Gate, it was never announced but it was obvious they were putting in a much stronger gate to prevent the intrusion by an auto. Now there are apparently at least many people that try to scale the fence and some may have been unreported. You can't comment on whether there might be consideration given to putting up something that might prevent this?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. That is a responsibility of the Secret Service, if there is to be any change.

Q Ron, you didn't tell us what time.

Q Ron, you didn't tell us whether or not we could get the report that is going to be given to the President.

MR. NESSEN: I will check, Dick, and see.

Q Also, another thing, Ron, on the whole matter of security on the White House grounds. In all deference to obvious legal niceties, I think it might be within the scope of your duties to provide more of that information on a day like today. I would suggest you all restudy it. Last night John was very helpful and gave us very good help on it, and I would think such a thing would be helpful during the day because it is so difficult to ascertain what we need to know otherwise. Nobody would give a damn about it if it did not happen to the President.

MR. NESSEN: I know. I understand the problem, but first I don't think I have as complete information as you would like, but Jack Warner and the Metropolitan Police do, and what questions there might be regarding people's legal rights and so forth is something that they are simply better able to factor into their answers than I am.

Q Ron, wouldn't it have been helpful both to us as well as to these gentlemen -- Jack Warner and Sharkey -- if you had gotten as much information from them rather than saying call them? They are going to be inundated, as somebody said, and I think Dick's point is well taken.

Why couldn't you have gotten this for us just before the briefing?

MR. NESSEN: Les, you know I think it is proper for the people who have the information and what other considerations might go into the release of the information such as people's legal rights and so forth and not giving away security precautions and so forth, I think it is better for them to answer the questions than for me to.

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Q Ron, did the President ask for any information about the dead man's family and is any consideration being given to them?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of, Ted.

Q Ron, what was the President doing and what time did Keiser call back and tell him the man had died? Had he retired?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, he was reading reports at the time of the initial episode.

Q Where exactly?

MR. NESSEN: In the Residence.

Q But where?

MR. NESSEN: In his study.

Q Where was he by the time the man died? Had he already gone to bed or was he still working?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that, Saul, but I will check back for you.

Q Ron, have you found out about Mrs. Ford?

Q And who else was home at the time?

MR. NESSEN: We will check on who was at home and what the President was doing at the time of the second phone call.

Q Ron, the first reports said Mrs. Ford was there and later reports mentioned only the President.

MR. NESSEN: We will confirm precisely who was at home.

Q Ron, could you find out for us if there were any White House medical personnel on duty and if they were asked to assist?

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Ron, can you find out what the reports were that the President was reading at 9:30 last night?

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Has the President spoken with the officer that did the shooting?

MR. NESSEN: He has not.

Q At the risk of belaboring an earlier point, I have, at least -- I don't know if everybody else does -- the impression that you really have sidestepped my previous question as to whether or not he was genuinely sorry about the fact that the man had died. From all the information that has been made available, so far, it sounds as though the man may have been deranged in some manner and that this was an unfortunate accident. There is no known motive at this point, as far as the authorities are willing to say.

Am I wrong in drawing that conclusion?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to think of it in the context of a man jumping over the fence, refusing to heed three warnings to stop, threatening an officer with what could have been a bomb and after all of that, the officer fulfilled what the President believes was his responsibility and his duty.

Now, on the general question of, does the President approve or disapprove of death, I think --

Q I didn't ask that. I would prefer not to write that you sidestepped the question, but that is my impression.

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I don't think I will be able to help you on that one.

Q Ron, what was the man doing about 45 minutes before he jumped over the fence? What was he doing out there? Was he protesting or carrying any signs?

MR. NESSEN: Sarah, I don't know, but as I say, the Metropolitan Police and the Secret Service can give you more complete details.

Q Ron, if you get anything out of the Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police, you are good and I don't think any of us will get anything.

MR. NESSEN: I know you are a good reporter, Sarah.

Q It is very hard to get anything out of the Metropolitan Police about any arrest in this town.

MR. NESSEN: Again, I don't think that this is the proper place to give those kinds of details.

Helen's question had to do with orders to shoot to kill and again, I have to refer you to the Secret Service for what order the EPS operates under.

Q The President's study on the North side or South side of the mansion?

MR. NESSEN: His study is on the South side.

Q Is there any thought being given to telling the Executive Protective Police in future to try to hit a man in the leg or the arm or something like that, or fire a warning shot?

MR. NESSEN: If there are any changes in security procedures, you would have to get that information from the Secret Service.

Q Doesn't the President think there ought to be something like that?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have given you the President's reaction.

Q The President has an image in here right now that is very important and does the President take any personal interest in this matter?

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q With death right here on his doorstep, doesn't he take a more personal interest in this thing?

MR. NESSEN: I think I indicated to you what his reaction to the episode was.

Q Ron, about a week ago, the President told us that he would have some good news on delegates subsequently. Is he going to have any good news himself on delegates this week?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. You have to ask Jim Baker.

Q What time are the Marylanders coming in?

MR. NESSEN: The Marylanders are coming in late this afternoon, about 5 o'clock, I believe.

Q Ron, what does Dick Cheney report on Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: There is no decision made on a trip to Mississippi. Dick Cheney has not returned from Mississippi yet and so has not given a report to the President yet.

Q Ron, the Republican National Committee has distributed -- I got one this morning -- a thing with all sorts of articles about Carter, including some stuff that Lester Maddox wrote about him. I am wondering, does the President approve of this type of campaigning? In other words, reproducing articles by people like Lester Maddox?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I haven't seen the product you are talking about.

Q Has the Reagan thing come out, the statement? I wonder if we could get some reaction on it.

MR. NESSEN: Nothing yet, I am told.

Q You will have something on it for us?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see what it is, first.

Q Ron, this question is not asked in a facetious manner, but why is the President bringing in entire delegations? For example, he will see Pennsylvania's entire delegation this week, after already having conferred with the nine uncommitted delegates. What is the reason?

MR. NESSEN: A couple of things. I think the President has spelled this out before. First of all, he wants to thank the delegates for their support. He wants to make himself available to answer any questions they may have about his policies, and that is why he has had these delegations in.

The question on Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Ford was with the President in the study at the time of the episode and Gay has the other questions and we are tracking those down, too.

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Q Does the President agree with Senator Tower's description of Jimmy Carter as "a man devoid of conviction, ruthless man on gathering power with a messianic idea of creating a benevolent dictatorship who smiles with his mouth and not with his eyes"?

MR. NESSEN: We have a long fall ahead of us, Les, and I don't think I am going to --

Q You mean you have no comment on a stalwart supporter of President Ford, such as Senator Tower?

MR. NESSEN: No, but what I was about to say was, I think as the fall unfolds I don't think we will be commenting upon every statement that is made.

Q This is a little different, Ron. This was made just yesterday by Senator Tower, the strongest supporter perhaps he has gotten, who took a lot of things on the chin for Ford. Are you all going to back up Tower or not?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Sarah, it is going to be a long fall.

Q That is no answer. That is your opinion about something that is really not important. That is just an observation. I want an answer.

MR. NESSEN: If the question is, does the President approve or disapprove of all or part of Senator Tower's statement, the answer is that as the election campaign goes on we will not be --

Q That is no answer. That is an observation of your answer, and it really is just a side issue.

Q It does not apply, Ron. Could you say, does the President agree with it or not? I mean, that seems to be a reasonable question. This is a very prominent Senator that backed him up, in Texas. Now, does the President repudiate it or not?

MR. NESSEN: Les, again, it is going to be a long campaign and I am not going to make a practice of commenting --

Q Maybe you aren't, but maybe the President is. Let's let the President talk on this.

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

Q Ron, is Dick Cheney's trip down to Jackson a new role for the White House Chief of Staff as opposed to somebody like Jim Baker, the delegate hunter, going down there? He has been down there for a couple of days.

MR. NESSEN: No, he just went down yesterday and he came back today.

Q Is that a new role for him?

MR. NESSEN: You all know Dick has a role in the President's campaign.

Q What is Dick Cheney's role?

MR. NESSEN: Dick Cheney's role is liaison between the PFC and the President, sort of contact person in the White House.

Q Why did he go to Mississippi? Was that a signal that the President wanted to show White House muscle sending Cheney down there as opposed to Baker?

MR. NESSEN: I think there were others in Mississippi as well as Dick.

Q Where was Morton? Was he down there? I thought that was his job.

MR. NESSEN: Morton is not at the White House, Sarah. He is Chairman of the campaign at the PFC.

Q Isn't he liaison between the committee and the White House?

MR. NESSEN: He is liaison on the committee side and Dick is liaison on the White House side.

Q Is the President disappointed with the decision to stay with the unit rule?

MR. NESSEN: Frankly, I don't understand enough about Mississippi politics to comment intelligently on it, and Dick has not returned yet to give the President a report on the weekend.

Q Is he coming back today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is.

Q What was his mission?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what Dick's mission was, precisely.

Q I don't think you answered yet why Cheney went to Mississippi. I am not aware of him going to any other State on his own. Why was it decided to send him to Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't talk to Dick at any great length before he left, but I will when he gets back and see if I can find out.

Q You don't know why the Chief of Staff went to Mississippi?

MR. NESSEN: Other than the fact that he is the liaison here between the President and the PFC.

Q The PFC is on L Street, Ron, it is not in Jackson, Mississippi.

MR. NESSEN: I will attempt to get a more detailed answer.

Q Who paid for his trip, Ron, and does he get a deduction for this half-day that he is not working at the White House?

MR. NESSEN: The trip, along with all other expenses that are related to the campaign, is paid for by the PFC.

Q Did he go commercial?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he did.

Q First-class or coach?

MR. NESSEN: I think if the PFC paid for it he probably went coach.

Q Is there any truth to the report that Pearl Bailey is being considered to keynote the GOP Convention?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, the RNC is in charge of convention officers and, as I understand it, Senator Baker is the keynote speaker.

Q They are not going to change that, are they?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, I was wondering, Jimmy Carter gave an interview to a Puerto Rican newspaper. He said that there was training of Puerto Ricans in Cuba for terrorist activities in Puerto Rico on the mainland. He denounced Castro for this. I am wondering, am I correct in my assumption this is a policy with which the Ford Administration is in agreement since the President called Castro an international outlaw? Does the President agree with Mr. Carter's condemnation of Castro for training Puerto Rican terrorists?

MR. NESSEN: If Castro is training Puerto Rican terrorists, the President certainly would condemn it.

Q Then, I was wondering, if we object to that --

MR. NESSEN: I knew I was going to step into a trip. I let my guard down right at the end there and you got me, Les.

Q -- why did Ambassador Scranton tell reporters in Lukasa of his willingness to give U.S. medical supplies to terrorists in Africa?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware he had. Let me look it up and see what it was Ambassador Scranton said.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:15 P.M. EDT)