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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12 NOON

AUGUST 2, 1976

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: You all think I have a surprise for you today, right?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: And the surprise is, I do not have a surprise.

Q What is your excuse?

Q Why are you delayed?

MR. NESSEN: I was trying to prepare myself.

Q You were attending the Harold Stassen press conference?

MR. NESSEN: Actually, I was looking at this example of the new spirit of brotherhood that is sweeping our country and our press room. A great example of ecumenism. I think. (Laughter)

Q Admit who asked to pose for that picture, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The lion shall lie down with the lamb.

Q Will you identify from right to left?

Q Who is that to the left of Mondale? (Laughter)

Q Schweiker.

MR. NESSEN: We do not have any changes in the schedule. The schedule consists today entirely of meetings with the President's staff and sometime this afternoon in which the President indicated he wanted to do some paperwork, so that is why the schedule appears to be rather slim today, but it actually is quite crowded with staff meetings.

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Q Ron, doesn't he have an appointment with the Secretary of Transportation this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, that meeting has been put off.

Q Put off?

MR. NESSEN: Right.

Q Ron, could you read us that private schedule so we have an idea who he is meeting with?

MR. NESSEN: It is just staff people.

Q Could you read it?

MR. NESSEN: Bush and Scowcroft, Hartmann, Cheney, Marsh, Rumsfeld, Nessen, speechwriters, et cetera.

Q Is that an acceptance speech?

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the purposes of speechwriters' meetings, is to continue work on the acceptance speech.

Q To continue it, when did it start?

MR. NESSEN: It has been underway for a couple of weeks now, two weeks, I guess, 2-1/2 weeks.

Q What is the subject? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: This is one of those occasions when I will break my rule and say it will be a major speech.

Q Who is leading the team of writers?

MR. NESSEN: Bob Hartmann is the head of the speechwriters, as always.

Q He doesn't think he is a little ahead of himself, does he?

MR. NESSEN: In this particular case, Bob Hartmann is playing a very important role in writing it.

Q Is anyone writing a competing version of this speech?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q That seems like a long time for writing a speech.

Q What was Barnes' question, please?

MR. NESSEN: Fred wanted to know whether there were any others in the building who were writing competing speeches. The answer is that the President asked a number of people to send to Bob Hartmann suggestions and ideas of what ought to be included in the speech, about 2-1/2 weeks ago. And they have since gone to Bob and Bob is putting a speech together.

Q Doesn't he think he is premature?

MR. NESSEN: No. It is an important speech and the President wants to devote plenty of his time to it.

Q Who were the people he asked to send in ideas to Hartmann?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know all the people. Some in the White House, some outside.

Q Ron, is he going to draft his own speech or is he just going to let other people write it and is he going to get up there and read it?

MR. NESSEN: I think the procedure will be pretty much the same as it is on all speeches, Walt, except the President will play a greater role in this one than he normally does. Drafts are brought to him and he rewrites the drafts and then rewrites the rewrite and rewrites the rewrite of the rewrite until he gets it as he wants it.

Q Has he selected the people he wants to nominate him yet?

MR. NESSEN: He has not, Helen, no.

Q Ron, do you know how many people he asked for suggestions on what is to go into the speech?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the number is.

Q Can you give us a ball park figure?

MR. NESSEN: I can't guess.

Q Is the Cabinet involved?

MR. NESSEN: I think there are some people outside the White House who were invited to submit ideas to Bob Hartmann.

Q Ron, you may have discussed this on Saturday. Why did the President not promise to abide by the results of that polling that he has made?

MR. NESSEN: He certainly wants to get the views and consult with his very wide group of people, but the choice of a running mate, I think, quite properly belongs to the President.

Q What if the delegates took some umbrage to this, Ron, and proceeded to elect as Vice President someone that the President did not want? What do you suppose would be the reaction there?

MR. NESSEN: I think as the President has said, he will make a recommendation to the Convention at an appropriate time and he expects his recommendations to be accepted.

Q In the event it doesn't, how would he react to that?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not take on a hypothetical question.

Q Will he disclose the results of the poll?

MR. NESSEN: No. As I indicated on Saturday, we don't expect to put out a tabulation of the results.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: The President promised the people who he is consulting with confidentiality.

Q Does the President have any comment on Senator Schweiker's suggestions that it was a charade since George Bush led in the first poll and Nelson Rockefeller was selected?

MR. NESSEN: First of all, I don't know that that is the case; but secondly, I think we dealt with that pretty much on Saturday.

Q You don't know for sure that Bush was the leader in that --

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the relevance is, John.

Q These are not tax returns. Why would the delegates care about confidentiality? Wouldn't they like to know what the results of the poll are?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. The President, in his letter, said he would keep the results strictly confidential in an effort to have the people be as forthcoming as possible.

Q Did he say the results or keep their names out of it or --

MR. NESSEN: I have to read precisely what the letter said.

Q Why couldn't he keep their suggestions confidential?

Q Why couldn't he just release the tabulations with no names?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think there is any plan to do that.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: The purpose is not to conduct a public opinion poll, Ed. The purpose is to give the President the benefit of the views of a very wide section of the leaders and workers in the Republican Party. I am sure Mr. Harris or Mr. Gallup can provide a public opinion sampling. Really, this is a survey for one client in order to help him choose a running mate.

Q Doesn't the President feel that the people that take the trouble to send in answers to his questionnaire would like to know before it is all over where the person the President ultimately chooses ended up in the poll amongst themselves and their peers as delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that they do.

Q Ron, isn't one reason the fact that he will not be bound by the poll? Didn't he make that clear?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have said that from the very beginning, Ted, that this is a method of soliciting the views of a very wide range of people in the party, but it was not meant as a sampling for publication. It was meant to help the President make his decision.

Q There is probably a good chance, though, Ron, that if the results are to his liking that he will mention this when he does make a selection.

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

The plan is not to publish the results because that was not the intention of the consultation process. The consultation process is for the President's benefit. Suppose the President picks the top one, won't he then announce the results as a way of showing something or another? The answer is, to my knowledge, there is no plan to publish the results one way or the other.

Q Ron, can you say whether or not this poll might be also intended to give the President a reading of opposition to people he has in mind?

MR. NESSEN: I think the consultation process is a consultation process. I don't know how you separate it. Some people will have wider support than other people would have.

Q I think you understand what I am getting at.

Q Is he looking not so much for new names, new ideas as he is a feeling for sentiment of the delegates on people that he has in mind at this point?

MR. NESSEN: It is a consultation process and that is all I can --

Q Is he going to see any delegates this week?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen any plans at this point for delegates coming in.

Q Ron, are letters now in the mail to the delegates and alternates?

MR. NESSEN: Let me find out what the details are. I guess the mailing goes out today.

Q He probably won't get them back before the Convention. (Laughter)

Q Who is in charge of the tabulation once the returns start coming in?

MR. NESSEN: I think I mentioned on Saturday, Russ, that all the letters will come in to Dick Cheney. There will be a return envelope addressed to the "President Ford Delegate Questionnaire, The White House, Washington, D. C." The purpose of including the envelope was to keep the Vice Presidential questionnaire mail separate from the rest of the White House mail so it wouldn't be opened down in the mailroom but would be sent to Dick Cheney unopened.

The return envelope does not have a stamp on it. The delegates and alternates will have to put their own stamps on it. The expenses of printing and mailing, of course, and stamping the outgoing mail is being paid for by the PFC. The deadline, so to speak, as mentioned in the letter, is August 11th. As I said, because of the special envelope that is being enclosed, the letters will be brought unopened to Dick Cheney's office.

Q Does Secret Service allow that?

MR. NESSEN: I think they will probably go through the normal x-ray machine, or whatever kind of security the Secret Service has over incoming mail, I guess. You ought to talk to Jack Warner about that.

Q Ron, how many of these are going out?

MR. NESSEN: Approximately 4,500. I don't know the exact number. The reason I cannot give you an exact number is I am not exactly sure how many alternates there are to the Convention. There are virtually the same number of alternates as delegates, but I think in some cases, not exactly the same number.

Q Will the questionnaire identify the State that the delegate or alternate is from, and will the questionnaire identify whether or not this is a Ford or Reagan delegate?

MR. NESSEN: I think if you read the letter here that went out on Saturday, Ted, you will see that the President says, "I request that you sign your letter, and I assure you that your response will be handled in complete confidence."

Q What about anonymous replies, those that do not accede to his request? Will he take those into consideration?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he will.

Q How would he know who it was, though? It might be a prank.

MR. NESSEN: I think if you get hold of the envelope, it is pretty much --

Q Would the President welcome letters from other Republicans around the Nation on their preferences for the Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: Absolutely. In fact, not only would he welcome them, he sought it out, Phil. As far as Members of Congress go, Senator Scott and Congressman Rhodes are going to bring in the results of their views later this week. Mary Louise Smith will be getting the recommendations of all the State chairmen and National Committee men and women of the RNC and bringing those in, and then the PFC State chairmen, and others, will send their recommendations in through Rog Morton. Then, there will be certain other categories like Cabinet and prominent Republicans who don't happen to hold public office at the minute.

As for other Republicans which are not on any of these lists, my own experience, over the past few days and weeks, almost everyone that comes to see the President these days offers an idea or two. And he, of course, accepts those and I know he would if they were mailed in or he encounters people.

Q Would he like to have Republicans from all over this country write him letters telling him their choice. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think he has indicated that he is anxious to consult widely on this.

Q Is that a yes?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, if you are thinking of going on the air and saying the President invited millions of Republicans to write him, I don't know of a plan to do that, but obviously, he has received the views of --

Q Ron, when is he going to make his choice public?

MR. NESSEN: At the appropriate time.

Q What is the appropriate time?

MR. NESSEN: It is not the appropriate time to tell you what the appropriate time is.

Q So, if it comes out in advance of the Convention, can we assume that was sooner than the appropriate time was planned to be?

MR. NESSEN: No, because I never announced what the appropriate time is.

Q The next time you talk with the President, will you ask him whether or not he would like to have Republicans writing in?

MR. NESSEN: I will, Phil.

Q Ron, suppose an unscrupulous Reagan delegate got hold of one of these inquiries and reproduced it so that the President got, say 5,500 responses for this, how would he know which ones are valid and which are not?

A second question, Ron. The President, I believe, refreshed my memory. In one of his press conferences, he was being pressed by the press about who might be it, and he said, use your imagination, it might be elsewhere, I think. In other words, what would happen if several of these delegates suggested Betty Ford as the Vice Presidential candidate? They don't live in the same State, they reside in the District. I just wonder, has he said anything about ruling out Mrs. Ford?

MR. NESSEN: He has not ruled out Mrs. Ford.

Q He has not?

MR. NESSEN: No. (Laughter)

In fact, that would be quite a strong ticket, I would think.

Q Ron, seriously, he has not ruled out Mrs. Ford, right?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think he has ruled out anybody.

Q He has ruled his wife out, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Did he?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: When?

Q Constitutionally, she cannot run.

MR. NESSEN: But Les said they live in different States.

Q They reside. That is a Constitutional question. They reside in the District.

Q Ron, who will see the results of this tabulation other than the President and Dick Cheney?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of anybody else who will see them.

Q Those two people are the only ones who will know who actually received the greatest number of recommendations?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding at the moment, yes.

Q Ron, could you give us any idea on what the President will base his decision on besides this poll and besides the criteria that he gave? Can you give us anything on what he will base his decision on besides the poll?

MR. NESSEN: I think the views of all these people whose views he is soliciting is a factor. The various criteria he listed in the letter, and I think, in talking to Time and Newsweek Magazine in the interviews that they have printed today, he expanded a bit on what he thinks about the reasons that will go into his selection.

I think it is possible there will be some delegates coming in to see the President this week, in response to an earlier question. I don't have the precise day or who they will be, but I think it is a possibility.

Q Ron, is he going any place this week? I understand he is going to Philadelphia Sunday.

MR. NESSEN: On Sunday, the President has been invited to take part in the closing ceremonies of the Eucharistic Congress, which he will do.

Q Will he be going to any other State conventions?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q What part is he going to take, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: In the Eucharistic Congress, first of all, there is a brief meeting with Cardinals and with church leaders -- a brief, informal meeting.

Then, the President will go to the stadium and he will speak very briefly at the beginning of what they call the concluding liturgy.

Q What time does this take place, Ron?

MR. NESSEN. Roughly, about 4:45 Sunday afternoon, to approximately 6:10.

Q Is this a campaign trip or a political trip?

Q Is it a campaign trip or a Presidential trip?

MR. NESSEN: That is a silly question.

Q I don't think it is a silly question because Jimmy Carter is reported not to be doing too well amongst the fish-eaters. (Laughter) I inject that seriously.

Q How about that again, Richard?

Q Amongst my fellow fish-eaters. I want to call attention to that. That is a serious question, Ron. Here, the President is going to the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia, which is, as you know, the major Catholic event in 1976. Jimmy Carter has been widely reported as not to be too popular amongst my fellow Roman Catholics. Now, the thing is, did the President decide to go on this trip, which I think was the question basically, for political or for other reasons and, if so, what were they, sir? I think it is a serious question.

Q I agree.

MR. NESSEN: As a serious answer, Dick, I would say the invitation to attend the Eucharistic Congress came from Cardinal Krol, the Archbishop of Philadelphia, and the Board of Governors of the Congress invited the President to attend this concluding liturgy.

I would say, first of all, that you should address the question to Cardinal Krol and see if he felt that he wanted to invite the President as some sort of political gesture or for some political motive, and also, the Board of Governors of the Eucharistic Congress which is bringing together, I guess, 500 Cardinals, Bishops and other members of the hierarchy of the church, and find what their political motive, if any, was in inviting the President.

Q What is the President's view of the trip?

MR. NESSEN: From what point of view, Fran?

Q Does he consider it in any way a campaign trip or is it part of his Presidential --

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to answer the question in a way that will allow you to write that the President today denied this, that he was going to Philadelphia as a political trip. I am just not going to do that.

Q Who is paying for it?

Q Would you equate it similar to his appearance before the Southern Baptists?

MR. NESSEN: I don't equate it as similar to anything, Fran. I equate it with an invitation from Cardinal Krol, the Archbishop of Philadelphia, and the Board of Governors of the World Eucharistic Congress. They invited the President and the President has accepted.

Q Ron, Carol asked who was paying for the trip.

MR. NESSEN: The Government will.

Q Is the policy of arms aid to Iran open-ended?

MR. NESSEN: Let me go back and finish my announcements, which I haven't quite done yet.

Q Ron, could you clarify one thing? Krol said yesterday -- I asked the question of his representative, was Governor Carter invited -- and he said no, because Mr. Ford was invited only as President of the United States, not as a candidate.

MR. NESSEN: That is a very good answer by Cardinal Krol. (Laughter)

Q Can I ask about the brief remarks? When you say "brief remarks," do you mean something like one page or is this apt to be, as Fran inquired, a two or three page speech, as was made at the Southern Baptist Convention?

MR. NESSEN: Incidentally, I have Cardinal Krol's letter here which is dated April 12th, if that helps you any.

Q Are you ignoring my question?

MR. NESSEN: I am looking up the answer. I just happened to come across Cardinal Krol's letter as I was looking up the answer.

The remarks are scheduled for five minutes.

Q In Spanish or Latin? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The other announcement that I didn't have a chance to make earlier was, the President has approved Federal disaster relief funds for the area around Loveland, Colorado, that suffered severe rainstorms and flooding over the weekend. The President signed the relief declaration this morning after receiving the request for aid from Governor Lamm, of Colorado, and the Federal assistance is being made available immediately.

The Federal Disaster Assistance Administration has already set up centers in the area to provide temporary housing and for other personal needs, and to begin providing information on the kinds of Federal aid that are available.

We have, I believe, an announcement of this. If it hasn't already gone out, we can put it out. The additional information can be obtained by calling the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration at 634-6666.

Q Ron, just one question. Which one of the speechwriters is writing the President's address to the Eucharistic Congress? Is it the Southern Baptist you have on the staff? He wrote most of the ones to the Southern Baptist Convention. He is a clergyman and I wonder, is he the one that is going to do it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know who is writing that speech, Les.

Q Are you through with your announcements?

MR. NESSEN: I am.

Q Is the President continuing the policy of open-ended arms aid to Iran?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot speak for the Nixon policy because I do not know what the Nixon policy was. I would not use your characterization of open-ended arms sales to characterize President Ford's policy toward arms sales.

Q What is it, then?

MR. NESSEN: First of all, the question is pretty academic at the moment, since the recently passed security assistance legislation provides a legislative formula for approving overseas arms sales. The security assistance legislation has a set of requirements in it, so the whole question is pretty academic.

Q But it does not affect already made agreements to sell arms to Iran; is that correct? There is no review --

MR. NESSEN: No, I think it has to do with proposals of arms sales beginning with the passage of the legislation, but in the past, certainly arms sales to any foreign country were reviewed by this Administration.

Q Has the President approved them as they are now?

MR. NESSEN: It all depends what the level was, Fran. I mean, if it was six old trucks to somebody, obviously, that is not something that got to the President. Others did. There are arms sales of that level.

Q The story is, they have gotten unlimited flow of various sophisticated weapons. Now, is that continuing?

MR. NESSEN: Every arms sale to any country up until the passage of this new legislation has been reviewed on its merits at the highest level of the Administration, and this is true of arms sales to Iran and other countries, and they were approved or disapproved on their merits. There was no such thing as, I think, what you referred to as an open-ended arms sales policy to any country.

Q Ron, there was this memo, apparently, according to the Senate staff report, in May of 1972. Nixon and Kissinger sent out a memo saying, the Shah could get virtually any arms he wanted. The question really is, did Government agencies consider that memo was still in effect after the Ford Administration came to power? Did you people do anything to rescind that memo to say that is no longer operative?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if there was a memo and, as I say, I don't know what the arms sales policy of the Nixon Administration was. I know what the arms sales policy of this Administration is up through the passage of this legislation and it was, each major arms sale to any country was reviewed at the highest level and approved or disapproved on its merits.

Q Has that bill been signed, by the way?

MR. NESSEN: I think it went into effect quite some time ago.

Q The Nixon Administration could have said the same thing, and did.

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MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Phil. I can't speak for the Nixon Administration.

Q The President ordered it. That is about the highest level you can go. It sounds to me up until this legislation was passed it sounds like you had the same policy as Nixon had.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the Nixon policy was. I know what the policy of this Administration was -- to review every major proposed arms sale on its merits and they were approved or disapproved on their merits.

Q When did that policy come into effect?

MR. NESSEN: The day President Ford came into the office.

Q How do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Because I checked.

Q Do you have a memo to that effect?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that it was reduced to memo form, Helen. It certainly has been the policy.

Q Can you give us a list of what arms are now being provided to Iran?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure the State Department or the Defense Department can.

Q Is it a matter of concern to the President that so many American technicians are in Iran?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how many American technicians are in Iran.

Q 60,000, I believe.

MR. NESSEN: I do not know the number.

Q Ron, did the President have a reaction to the Gallup match-up showing him 33 points behind Governor Carter at this time?

MR. NESSEN: I think we made a policy not to react to each poll that comes out, John.

Q When you saw him this morning, did you ask him about it?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Could you ask about it?

MR. NESSEN: I know his feeling on polls is that the one that counts will be the one on November 2, which he expects to win.

Q Ron, do you have a fix yet when the President is going to go to Kansas City?

MR. NESSEN: He has not made the decision yet.

Q What will that be based on? Why is he holding up on it?

MR. NESSEN: There are a number of considerations that he is weighing and how much business he has here that week.

Q How many delegates he has?

MR. NESSEN: I guess one of the considerations would be what his activities would be if he went to Kansas City.

Q Ron, excuse me. Can I pursue that a little further? I think in one of the interviews that was published yesterday he said he expected to go Sunday or Monday.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so because I know for a fact he has not decided when to go yet.

Q The words "Sunday or Monday" I know appeared in quotes.

MR. NESSEN: That is one of the options, is to go Sunday or Monday and another option is to go Tuesday and another option is to go Wednesday.

Q The story I saw said he will probably go Sunday or Monday. He didn't say that?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't seen the quote. I know for a fact he has not made the decision.

Q You aren't trying to leave the impression on the Gallup Poll the White House is indifferent to those results, are you, or that it doesn't really matter what the poll said?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is the same position we have had all through spring, Walt, which is, there is only one poll that counts and that we are not going to react to every poll, which we haven't. The one poll that counts, the President expects to win.

Q Ron, is the President concerned about the evident failure of the involved parties to reach any agreement on the swine flu program? HEW, as I understand it, had hoped to announce an agreement last Friday, and they didn't because the various sides can't agree. Is the President monitoring the issues?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that checking with HEW this morning that they are continuing their negotiations with the drug companies and with the insurance companies, and the Secretary has sent word over that he is optimistic that an arrangement acceptable to all can be reached shortly.

Q When did he do that?

MR. NESSEN: Well, he did when I checked by telephone this morning.

Q Optimistic that --

MR. NESSEN: That an agreement can be reached which will be acceptable to everybody and that it can be reached shortly. He is optimistic of that.

Q Ron, on the Iran thing, are you saying that the arms sales to Iran are subject to the same interagency check that all sales are? In other words, arms sales to Iran are no different to any other place?

MR. NESSEN: That is absolutely right.

Q Ron, you were not referring to, I think, proposed legislation which would make it easier for Congress to stop arms sales above amount X? It used to be \$25 million. I think they dropped that sum down.

MR. NESSEN: I am saying, the whole question of the review process which has been in effect from the beginning of the Ford Administration to the passage of that legislation provided a review at the highest level.

Now, there is a legislation in place which Congress mandates a form of review.

Q Yes, but there is a revision of that. You were referring to the one that has been in place for a year or more, for several years, in fact.

MR. NESSEN: No, I think it was passed here about a month ago.

Q That has become law and has been assigned by the President. Is the President going to have a news conference this week?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for one.

Q Ron, is the President making telephone calls to delegates now and has he called Mississippi delegates since he came back from the trip?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, frankly, because I have not kept up that much on his phone call list.

Q Can you elaborate in any way on the President's comments in the interview, I believe it was with Newsweek, where he was discussing Governor Connally's prospect as Vice Presidential nominee, and where they might be hurt by the charges that were brought against him, and where he said that he was cleared by a jury of his peers and very few people in this country have had 12 good and faithful jurors give them a clean bill of health?

What did he mean by that?

MR. NESSEN: What could he have meant by that? What are the possibilities?

Q I am asking you. Can you explain them? I don't think my views matter.

MR. NESSEN: I cannot expand on it, Dick.

Q Ron, was the President upset by Senator Schweiker's statement yesterday that Ford cannot win in November? Does he feel this is hurting the Republican Party -- this kind of talk?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the President's views on his confidence that he will win in November.

Q I am asking, did he have any comment on Senator Schweiker's statement?

MR. NESSEN: I did not hear him make any comment, no.

Q Ron, one more question.

The President has said that it does not bother him that reporters and photographers watch him take off in his helicopter.

Can you explain to us why they persist it is the rule they can no longer go out to see him? .

MR. NESSEN: We have been through this so many times, Fran, and nothing has really changed.

Q You have never given a reason.

Q What is the reason for it? If the President does not mind and the President is requesting this and this is an open Administration, we are supposed to be able to see him when he is out there in public.

MR. NESSEN: As you know, and this is the same explanation I have given each time you asked about it, in the past there has been no coverage like that in previous Administrations.

Q That is not true.

MR. NESSEN: Some previous Administrations, and we did institute it, and now we have decided to go back to the previous.

Q Let's take a few steps here.

In the first place, even in the Nixon Administration where people were limited to the colonnade, the foliage was such that it was still possible to view the helicopter and people boarding it, although not very well.

MR. NESSEN: Well, we are not going to defoliate the Rose Garden.

Q I am not asking you to defoliate the Rose Garden. I am just asking you to let us go where we can see them. I don't understand the reasoning. I think we should have an explanation unless you approve of the policies of past Administrations.

MR. NESSEN: As I have said, every time we talk about this, Fran, we are going back to the --

Q During the Kennedy Administration --

MR. NESSEN: I think, Phil, I don't know whether the Kennedy Administration had any filming of helicopter takeoffs.

Q What has that got to do with it?

MR. NESSEN: I do not like the implication of Phil's question.

Q It is a bit symptomatic of something like, for instance, in Jackson, Mississippi, where a certain member of the White House staff chased away the wire service photographers and where they were positioned. Therefore, they could not get any of the pictures that they needed of the President and Clarke Reed. Both the wire service photographers were a bit upset about it, and I think rightly so, in the way it was done. They are down there to do a job.

I just do not think it was right the way it was done. Without going into details about it, I think somebody should talk to them about it directly.

MR. NESSEN: I think they have been.

Q Ron, I thought it was accepted. The reason was, he kept bumping his head on the helicopter door, isn't that the case?

MR. NESSEN: Not as far as I am concerned.

Q What is the reason? You have never stated it.

MR. NESSEN: I think I have stated the reason.

Q No you have not.

Q You stated the decision, but you have given us no reason.

MR. NESSEN: The reason is, we are returning to --

Q That is not a reason.

Q That is not a reason, it is a result.

MR. NESSEN: It is the reason.

Q But why?

MR. NESSEN: That does not keep it from being a reason.

Q That is not a reason.

MR. NESSEN: This is about the fifth time we have done this number.

Q I am wondering if you understand what we are trying to say?

MR. NESSEN. We will take up all of your time.

Q Do you understand what we are trying to say to you?

MR. NESSEN: I think what you want to do, Phil, is go back to the previous system of the protective pool on the South Lawn. It has always been a protective pool in this Administration and former Administrations.

Q So what is your objection?

MR. NESSEN: It is still a protective pool.

Q It is not a protective pool.

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I am sorry. The function of a protective pool, and we all know this, is to be there in case anything happens. Now, if anything happens, it means the helicopter crashes or catches fire or blows up. You are in the position to do that job from where the new location has been placed.

Q That is not true, and there is no reason on God's green earth why we should not be allowed to see the President get on a helicopter.

Q That is right, and it has never been a protective pool. We have been able to film the man as he got in the helicopter and leave.

Q He has invited us on occasions and had groups out there to watch, which we were supposed to cover.

Q Ron, as Fran says, if the President has no objection to this and expressed no objection, why should you interpose? It is not a terribly important thing to me, personally, but I think to all of these people --

MR. NESSEN: That pool is a protective pool, and it needs to be in a place where it can perform its protective function. It is in a position where it can protect --

Q Ron, we were asked for a story on that.

MR. NESSEN: I am explaining it.

Q You don't really mean to stand here and tell us if something did happen on that helicopter that the Secret Service is going to turn around, back over behind the crab apple trees and say, "Come on boys, have at it." You know it is not going to happen just as well as I know that.

MR. NESSEN: It is not a Secret Service function to lead the protective pool. It is somebody from my office who is always with the protective pool.

Q The fact of the matter is, you can't see a thing with that tent up there.

MR. NESSEN: The tent will be coming down.

Q Let me express, as far as I am concerned, a member of this White House Press Corps, I consider it smacking right in the face of your claim that you have an open White House.

MR. NESSEN: I think you have expressed that on a number of occasions, Phil.

Q I think I am expressing it, and I have a feeling most of this press room right now is telling you again.

Q I think it is unanimous, Ron.

Q What is the fear here?

MR. NESSEN: The protective pool, and all protective pools of this one and back through the years, have been for the purpose, as we all know, of providing the kind of deathwatch coverage which networks and wire services need.

Q So, why have you wiped it out?

MR. NESSEN: This pool is for the purpose of covering the crash of the helicopter. If and when it crashes, I guarantee you that the person from the Press Office --

Q In case something happens, but they cannot report what happens if they cannot see it, so they are no protective pool.

MR. NESSEN: If something happens, Dick, they will be taken to where it has happened.

Q After the fact, Ron?

Q What is your real objection to our covering this?

Q Ron, in making this decision, did anybody on the White House staff ever consider the possibility that they didn't want any member of the First Family to be embarrassed because they might have had an excess of alcoholic beverages, and they didn't want to be seen going to and from the helicopter?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Then, what is the reason?

Q The head-bumping that I referred to before, Ron, it was widely assumed all over the country that is why you did it. He kept bumping his head and it kept getting into the newspapers and on TV. I certainly assumed that was the reason.

Q Is that the reason?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have given you the set of reasons.

Q You have not given us one reason, not one reason, Ron, in all the times you discussed that.

Q How does the White House differ from the Camp David coverage where we can still see the helicopter landing and taking off?

Q I guess the point is, you have no reason that you will express.

MR. NESSEN: Phil, I think I have --

Q Frances raises a very legitimate question. Are you cancelling that coverage now?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with the Camp David coverage. I will have to look at it.

Q How about if we tell you what the coverage is and you tell us whether it is permissible?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it, Dick.

Q Do we have an assurance from the Press Office there will be no more manhandling of photographers?

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with manhandling, Phil.

Q On the last trip to Mississippi, there was an occasion where you personally pulled two photographers back as they were trying to do their job?

MR. NESSEN: I think I urged them to move back.

Q You put your hands on them. Do we have an assurance that that will cease?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will probably deal directly with the photographers involved, Phil.

Q Don't laught about it. You laid your hands on them. You pulled them off.

MR. NESSEN: I think we probably chatted with them.

Q Did you apologize to them?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will probably deal with the photographers involved, Phil.

Q Do we have an assurance that is not going to happen anymore?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will deal with the folks who are involved.

Q Ron, suppose the photographer slugged you in defending himself. You are keeping one guy out of that share-all because he slugged a press officer who called you a liar. If you are going to lay your hands on people, Ron --

THE PRESS: Okay.

END

#550 (AT 12:46 P.M. EDT)