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

#560

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:05 A.M. CDT

AUGUST 16, 1976

MONDAY

(Kansas City, Missouri)

MR. NESSEN: I guess we will have the regular White House briefing rules for this, which is no tape or film, because I really don't have that much to say, anyhow.

For the President's schedule this morning, one is a compilation of, I think, about 36 pieces of legislation that the President has signed. Most of them are private relief bills. I think the only two that will be of much interest to you are the Pennsylvania Avenue development project and the Transportation Department appropriation. There is a little package being passed out right now, even as we speak.

Q Will we receive as delivered texts of statements that the President makes, such as the one to the welcoming committee last night?

MR. NESSEN: As far as we know, they are as delivered texts. We made an as delivered of that, and I also saw an as delivered of his remarks to the Presidentials this morning.

Q Where are they?

MR. NESSEN: The press release table is in the back of the room. You will find it all in the back there.

The other press release handed out today was by Bill Greener, and the PFC, and it has to do with the PFC officials and Cabinet officers and Governors and so forth and their assignments to talk to various State delegations. Bill is around here somewhere.

Q We haven't gotten that one, either, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Ask Greener where it is. Maybe it is just in the process of being handed out.

MORE

#560

Q Is this being filmed, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly hope not. I said a while back that we will have regular White House briefing rules.

Q Then can we have the lights turned off?

MR. NESSEN: I have been trying to get them turned off.

Q Ron, let me ask about the PFC releases. Are they going to be available in here on the White House release desk?

MR. NESSEN: There is a table back there of people from the PFC that will be manned all the time and there is a table for the White House Press Office that will be manned all the time and their press releases will be available here.

Just to briefly go through the schedule, I think you have all seen the schedule for yesterday and for today.

The President's meetings last night concluded at about 10:30. He went to bed at 11:15. This morning the President was up at 6:45. You know about the meeting with the Hawaii delegates and Guam at 8:30. Then the President has made the trip over to see the Presidentials at the Trade Mart.

This afternoon, he will be meeting with some delegates.

Q From what States?

MR. NESSEN: I will try and get that for you after the meetings are held, Helen. It is somewhat uncertain now because we don't know exactly what time the morning session of the Convention is going to conclude.

Q At home or away?

MR. NESSEN: It will be the visiting delegates.

Q Are they uncommitted, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't like to characterize them. They, I think, fall into different categories.

Q They are not all from one place, are they? They are from various places?

MR. NESSEN: They are various, from various States.

Q Who are they?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a complete list. I am going to try to get that for you after the meetings conclude.

Q Ron, are some of them Reagan delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I can't characterize them for you right now, Gaylord. I will try and get more information after the meetings are held.

Q What time will the meetings begin?

MR. NESSEN: It all depends on what time the morning session concludes.

Q What is the purpose, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: To talk to them, answer their questions and hear their views on the Vice Presidential nominee and so forth.

Q They must be either uncommitted or Reagan delegates, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to characterize them ahead of time, but I will try and get more details after they are through.

MORE

Q Can you give us an indication of what the President said to the Hawaiian delegation?

Q Question.

MR. NESSEN: Phil asked what the President said to the Hawaiian delegation. He opened with a statement of about two or three minutes in which he talked about his record and his ability to win in November and pointed to the latest polls as an example of his already narrowing the gap.

Q How about explaining that?

MR. NESSEN: Then, he took questions for about 15 or 20 minutes on a whole array of subjects.

Q Did they ask about the Vice Presidential choice?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did he talk to them about it?

MR. NESSEN: He was asked about it.

Q What did he say?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't say anything more than we have said publicly, Gaylord.

Q There are three uncommitted delegates in the Hawaiian delegation. Were any of them snared as a result of the President's efforts?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask them.

Q Ron, will the President be meeting with these delegates individually or in groups this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: In small groups.

Q Ron, was there any talk about the polls showing the President closing the gap?

MR. NESSEN: As I understand it, there was a Harris Poll out this morning in some newspapers which indicates --

Q Can you give us the figures from that?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, I am not going to give it from here obviously, Walt.

Q Why not?

Q Will there be three or four meetings this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: It is hard to say because the exact schedule at the Convention and when it will break up is not certain, so it will depend partly on that.

Q These were invited by the President to come see him?

MR. NESSEN: And some have asked for an opportunity to see him.

Q Will there be some there who had not asked to see him but who he asked to see?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know exactly how it breaks down between the two groups.

Q But there are some of each?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding, yes.

Q Is it likely there will be an announcement after the delegates come out -- a trophy-type announcement?

MR. NESSEN: It is not intended, no.

Q We were told by some of the Hawaiian delegation that Ford said something about it is now down to five or six people?

MR. NESSEN: No, he didn't, Bob. What he said was, as he continues to review the results of the solicitation of views that he made, that five or six of the possible Vice Presidential running mates were sort of bunched at the top. They got most of the recommendations. And then, there was a scattering support for a lot of others. That is the point he made.

Q Who were those five or six?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't name them.

Q Will you?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did he speak to Governor Connally last night?

MR. NESSEN: He did not, to my knowledge.

Q Will he be meeting with these five or six today or tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, he won't.

Q Ron, does that or does it not necessarily mean that he will choose one from those top five or six?

MR. NESSEN: It doesn't necessarily mean that.

Q Then why did he say that? I mean, what is the point? He wasn't saying it was narrowing down?

MR. NESSEN: No, it certainly wasn't. It was in response to a question, Helen.

Q Two of the delegates quoted the President as saying that his survey had boiled this thing down to five or six. He didn't identify them, true, but they quoted the President as saying, the survey boiled it down to five or six.

MR. NESSEN: A survey -- well, look, Phil, let me make a point because I think it will be a valid point for really until Thursday. That is this: Specifically on this morning's meeting, what the President said was what I told Bob, which is, in the survey he took, five or six people attracted the big majority of the recommendations and the other recommendations were scattered among a lot of other candidates.

Now, on the Vice Presidential question, in general, there is only one person who really knows where the President stands in his selection and that is the President. He hasn't shared it with any members of his staff or any friends or delegates at all. That is exactly where it stands.

Now, anybody who comes -- you know, all of you have been to conventions before and know the high rumor quotients in a convention. There are a lot of them this week and a lot have to do with the Vice Presidency. But anybody who tells you they know who it is or they know who the five or six are, or they know who is in or who is out, or who is up or who is down, is either number one, deliberately misleading you -- and it is probably a better story to find out why they are doing that -- or they are just sort of hoping you will think they know more than they really know. But the only person who really knows isn't talking, and that is the President.

Q We don't need this lecture every day.

MR. NESSEN: I was hoping by giving it today I wouldn't have to give it every day.

Q But the President said there were five or six that were top heavy.

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean "top heavy"?

Q Isn't he going to take that into consideration?

MR. NESSEN: He is going to take all of the recommendations into consideration.

Q Would you kindly read the list of people who are under consideration for the Vice Presidency?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: Because the President has indicated that he wants to handle it this way, and he is.

Q What is the status, official or unofficial, of all the lists that we have been reading of people who are under consideration? Does that have no standing at all, those lists?

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

Q There have been various press lists compiled of people being considered.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why can't the White House, in the interests of eliminating rumors, put out a list of people who have been asked for financial reports? Why is that such a big deal?

MR. NESSEN: Look, we can talk all day about the Vice Presidential lists. I don't have anything new to say about it. You know, lots of questions are going to produce nothing new.

Q Ron, the survey that has been taken, someone is tabulating the results. Who is tabulating it?

MR. NESSEN: Some members of the President's staff have been assigned to tabulate it.

Q What I am trying to find out is how many people are involved in this for the President? Is it Cheney who is involved in tabulating this?

MR. NESSEN: I think we have said that Dick is involved in compiling the information.

Q Does it go beyond that?

MR. NESSEN: There are some others obviously involved.

Q Ron, who are those people?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to name them.

Q Ron, you say a survey. I am not sure I understand what you mean. Is this X number of people --

MR. NESSEN: This is the 5,000 or so people, I forget the exact number of people who were solicited, to send in their recommendations.

Q Last night, either you or John said there would be someone from the President Ford Committee would be here to brief this afternoon. Is that still the plan?

MR. NESSEN: Jim Baker has indicated that he is tied up with other matters. He won't be over here in the middle of the day, but he may get over here later in the afternoon. Bill will post the time when he will get over here.

Q I would like to ask a question -- one I would have asked at that subsequent briefing. Last night, I was told that President Ford delegate hunters were polled to see if they would be able to beat 16-C. Can you give us the result of that poll?

MR. NESSEN: I will get somebody from the PFC to give it to you.

Q Ron, who is going to nominate President Ford?

MR. NESSEN: It hasn't been decided yet.

Q When will it be decided?

MR. NESSEN: Later in the week.

Q Isn't that odd it hasn't been decided who is going to nominate him?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not odd to me.

Q Ron, has he asked Ford headquarters to go ahead and start writing speeches?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Phil. Not that I have heard of.

Q Ron, Reedy said the President would be talking with some party leaders today on his ideas of Vice Presidential selections.

MR. NESSEN: Some of these delegates who are coming in --

Q Party leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think -- well, the delegates are delegates.

Q Are any party leaders coming in to talk to him today?

MR. NESSEN: It is not on his schedule, no.

Q Will you tell us who he met with last night? You were supposed to put out a list of that, and I never saw it.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't bring my complete list with me, but as I said last night, you can figure out who it is. It is Morton, Spencer and --

Q No, please tell us.

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you.

Q We can't make it up.

MR. NESSEN: Where is that list I had of the attendees? Ask John for that list of people who went up.

Q While you are looking for that, you also mentioned that he had the Guam delegation?

MR. NESSEN: The Guam delegation and Hawaii. They were together.

Q They were together?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q So, what he said to the Hawaii delegates, he also said to the Guam people?

MR. NESSEN: It was one meeting, one caucus.

Just to finish my announcements, I was up to this afternoon on the schedule.

This evening you know the President will be going to the reception that Congressman Rhodes is giving. It is at the Radisson Muehlebach.

Q Is that only pool?

MR. NESSEN: Travel pool; no coverage inside.

Q What time is he coming back?

MR. NESSEN: At 6:30 he will return.

Q Is it a private party?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Then the President will have dinner upstairs and watch television this evening.

Q Is it a private party?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q What happens after that?

MR. NESSEN: Then the President will have dinner upstairs and watch television.

Q He is not going out tonight?

MR. NESSEN: He doesn't plan to go out tonight.

Q Is he seeing anyone tonight?

MR. NESSEN: Various staff people.

Q No more delegates?

MR. NESSEN: No, not tonight.

Q What will he do tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: We will be posting the full schedule for tomorrow --

Q What is on television tonight? Kojak, M*A*S*H*, and what else?

MR. NESSEN: We will post the full schedule for tomorrow about 6:00 this evening.

Q Ron, is he meeting with any full delegations? Is he meeting with the Wyoming delegation this afternoon?

MR. NESSEN: It is not my understanding that he is meeting with the full delegation, no.

Q What else is he doing besides having dinner and watching television? He could have stayed home and watched television. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: He will watch the Convention on television, and he will have his various managers with him, and he will be in touch with the trailer at the Arena, so he can relay to them his decisions on any matters.

Q Can you discuss the way they are surveying the Vice Presidential thing? Are they just ranking them at the top, or possibly pulling out the good points or bad points, that sort of thing?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't think we are going to elaborate anymore on the Vice Presidential process until it is time to name him.

Q Is that survey completed? Have they gone through all the responses?

MR. NESSEN: They are just about through all the responses now.

Q Do you have a number?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q What was the question?

MR. NESSEN: Have all the responses solicited been tabulated, and I said they are just about finished now. Can I give a number, a total number of responses? I don't have that.

Q Ron, let me ask you about the meeting with the Hawaiian delegates this morning. Did the President indicate that his choice would be from among those five or six?

MR. NESSEN: No, he didn't

Q Did you talk to the President about the Reagan people trying to push hard on the Convention floor for naming the Vice Presidential running mate early? Will you all strongly oppose that? What will be your stance? You opposed it in the rules, of course.

MR. NESSEN: We are pleased with the outcome of the vote in the Rules Committee.

Q So, what will be your position on the floor if they do get it to the floor?

MR. NESSEN: We don't favor any change in the decision made by the Rules Committee.

Q So, you will do everything you can to keep that from coming about?

MR. NESSEN: We favor the stand taken by the Rules Committee.

Q Ron, in regard to Rules Committee votes, have you made a count of what the vote would be if it came to the floor of the Convention?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to forecast the vote on the floor.

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Q Do you all have any reading on how many votes the Reagan people would be able to get on the floor? Are you confident you can win on the floor?

MR. NESSEN: I will check to get someone from the PFC to give you a better rundown on that.

Q Ron, can you tell us whether the President personally read over the keynote speech of Senator Baker that he will deliver tonight?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge.

Q Ron, while we are on that, will an advance text be available of that?

MR. NESSEN: I will check. I haven't heard of it.

Q At breakfast this morning with reporters, Rog Morton said that chief White House speechwriters had edited the keynote speech of Senator Baker and have deleted what he felt were extraneous and offensive references to Watergate. My question is, is it the proper role of a White House speechwriter to be editing the speech of a Senator who is delivering the keynote speech at a Republican election Convention?

MR. NESSEN: I hadn't heard of it before and I don't know the details of what took place.

Q Do you know that Mr. Gergen has not edited it, or has edited it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I hadn't heard of it until you just --

Q You won't comment on it in any way?

MR. NESSEN: I just heard of it for the first time.

Q Ron, when do you expect the President will make his first appearance on the Convention floor?

MR. NESSEN: On the Convention floor?

Q When do you expect him to go over there the first time?

MR. NESSEN: As I indicated last week, the plan is for the President to go Thursday night and accept the nomination.

Q You don't think there is any chance he might go before that?

MR. NESSEN: I know of no plans for that.

Q Ron, are there any plans for a meeting between the President and Governor Reagan before the nomination?

MR. NESSEN: None that I know of.

Q Ron, is any meeting set up for afterwards, or any arrangements on how they will get together afterwards?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure that the President will want to see and talk to Governor Reagan after the nomination is decided and among other things, get his view on the Vice Presidential choice. I think the President said that last weekend, but I don't have any exact details to give you today.

Q I am not talking about the survey. I just want to know the number of persons being considered.

MR. NESSEN: We are not going to name it.

Q What is your delegate count today?

MR. NESSEN: Jim Baker will be here sometime this afternoon and bring you up-to-date on the delegate count.

Q On the one hand, you warn people to stay away from rumors. On the other hand, you are asked perfectly legitimate questions which you have every reason to answer but you just stand up there and won't answer them.

MR. NESSEN: The President is in the process of picking his Vice Presidential running mate. And when he has done it, we will announce the name and then afterward, we will help reconstruct how he reached that decision.

Q Ron, none of us are asking who the nominee is, we are not trying to break into the President's own personal process. We are asking you to confirm things that have been in the public press, the number of people, their names, that kind of thing. We are not breaking into the Presidential process. We are asking you legitimate questions and we are unable to understand why you won't respond to them.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I just don't have anything further to say today on the Vice Presidential process.

Q I see the President is citing these polls. Does he believe in polls?

MR. NESSEN: You know we don't talk about the polls when they are down and we are not going to talk about them when they are up.

Q But you are talking about them.

MR. NESSEN: I was asked what he told the Hawaii delegation, and I told you what he told the Hawaii delegation, but I am not going into a long thing about polls here because then you would say I only talk about the good ones.

Q I asked you, does he believe in the polls?

MR. NESSEN: He believes that he is going to win the only poll that counts, which is November 2.

Let me just finish the day's activities.

We got up to tonight, where he is going to be up in his office monitoring the Convention, making whatever decisions have to be made. You know that Jack and Steve Ford went to the Convention this morning and Mrs. Ford and Susan went to the Convention slightly later. Mrs. Ford will go to the Convention tonight.

Bill Greener or Peter Kaye will let you know at what time they will have Jim Baker or somebody else from the PFC to give you some of the information you have been asking about, delegate counts and polls and so forth, surveys.

Q When will that be, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Bill and Peter indicate that it would be safe for you to take a lunch break now. It is not going to be before sometime in midafternoon. I will post at 6:00, which should give you the schedule for tomorrow and any other activities that we are announcing.

As you know, there is a desk in the back for the PFC and the White House. I am going to be in the office for most of the afternoon.

Q Will you brief every day at 11:00 or reasonably close?

MR. NESSEN: Reasonably close, yes.

Q During his sojourn in Kansas City, approximately how much of his time will the President spend on political business and how much of his time on managing the Government?

MR. NESSEN: He is spending a good deal of the morning on Government business, and obviously will spend whatever amount of time is required.

Q Can you clarify that further? Half and half?

MR. NESSEN: I can't quantify it any further.

Q Ron, didn't you say last week that the President would not be making up his mind on his Vice Presidential choice until Wednesday or so?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly not until Wednesday night or possibly Thursday morning.

Q Ron, who was there last night and I would like to know what strategists he is meeting with today.

Q Can you tell us anything about what they discussed at the strategists' meeting this morning at 8:00?

MR. NESSEN: Strategy.

Q Why is Mrs. Ford cancelling many of her appointments today?

MR. NESSEN: I wasn't aware that she was cancelling anything. She has a very full schedule. If you look at it, you will see that she is occupied almost every minute.

Q Why isn't she keeping that printed schedule?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: John had some feeling that Mrs. Ford had cancelled portions of her schedule. My understanding is that she is at the Convention this morning and she will be there again tonight.

Q Ron, this morning the President met with the Hawaii-Guam delegation. What Presidential business did he conduct?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, Brent is here, Cheney is here, Cannon, Marsh and all those people.

Q Did he see them this morning?

MR. NESSEN: He saw some of them this morning.

Q When will he see Secretary Kissinger?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what his arrival time is.

Q Ron, will he see all those people?

MR. NESSEN: No. I said all those people are here. You know if the President needs to consult with them on White House people, they are here to be consulted with.

Q You said he saw some of them?

MR. NESSEN: He is devoting his mornings -- primarily early mornings -- to those kinds of activities.

Q You mean before 8:00?

MR. NESSEN: He got up at 6:45. I don't think there has been very much this morning in the way of Government business transactions.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:33 A.M. CDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 7:10 P.M. CDT

AUGUST 16, 1976

MONDAY

(Kansas City, Missouri)

MR. NESSEN: I was asked by various people today what the reaction was to this -- what did they call it -- amendment to prologue of foreign policy national defense and international economic policy section of the platform.

I think you are familiar with this proposal. All I am going to say tonight is that the platform, as approved by the Platform Committee today, is acceptable to the President. He looks forward to running on that platform. If any amendments are offered on the Convention floor, we will study each proposal and determine our position.

That is all I really have.

Q So, you haven't determined a position on this?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q You will not determine until the amendment is offered?

MR. NESSEN: If it is offered on the Convention floor.

Q Do you have any reason to doubt that it will be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any idea. You will have to ask the people that are talking about it.

Q Obviously, it is a slap at the President's foreign policy. He can't be very happy with it.

MR. NESSEN: I have heard people who make that interpretation. I have heard others, including your colleagues, who make the exact opposite conclusions.

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Q The President is happy with the platform?

MR. NESSEN: As written and approved by the Platform Committee, that is correct.

Q Does the President think this is a political ploy or a statement of principles by his worthy opponents?

MR. NESSEN: He hasn't had time to study it, Dick.

Q Can you say whether the President has read the final draft of the keynote speech.

MR. NESSEN: To my knowledge, he has not.

Q Does he know what is in it?

MR. NESSEN: I think I told some others earlier today that Howard Baker, apparently as a courtesy, sent a copy of his speech over here and somebody told me, as a courtesy he sent one over to the Reagan office, too. But the White House certainly did not make any changes, additions, deletions, or editing of Howard Baker's keynote speech.

Q What about what Rogers Morton said this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear what Rog said this morning.

Q He has since confirmed that he read it and said it was too long and made reference to Watergate and he asked him to refine it a little bit and take the Watergate stuff out.

MR. NESSEN: Was Rog talking about himself?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: I was talking about the White House.

Q He said it himself.

MR. NESSEN: I think Howard said he sent a copy over. In fact, he may have sent an earlier copy over.

Q Will we be able to get a comment from the President on the speech afterwards?

MR. NESSEN: I doubt it, Helen.

Q Who is going to nominate the President?

MR. NESSEN: It has not been decided, yet.

Q Obviously, it has been decided because Jim Baker knew about it.

MR. NESSEN: We are not ready to announce that yet.

Q Are there any additions to the schedule tonight?

MR. NESSEN: No. He has some friends in to eat dinner with him.

Q Who?

MR. NESSEN: His brothers are up there with him.

Q What are their names?

MR. NESSEN: I will have to get all the names.

Q Do you plan to brief tomorrow?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I will.

Q What time is the President due back?

Q About 11:50.

MR. NESSEN: Let's brief at noon.

Q How many Virginia delegates is he inviting up tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't see any up there. There are no delegates up there.

Q I didn't say there were any up there. I said, how many delegates will he be inviting up there tonight?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think any more delegates are going to be invited tonight.

Q Are you sure about that? We heard the West Virginia delegates were coming.

MR. NESSEN: No. As far as I know, there are none. He is going to have dinner with his brothers and a couple of old friends.

Q It is firm, no more delegates?

MR. NESSEN: I will double check for you, but I am almost positive there are none.

Q That proposed plank is under study now?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, under study?

Q They announced their intention. They have their 25 percent. It has been offered as an amendment?

MR. NESSEN: Well, we have a copy of it, obviously, and are looking it over and will determine our position.

Q But not necessarily oppose it?

MR. NESSEN: We are just studying it.

Q So, you are not necessarily opposed to it, you are just in favor of what is in?

MR. NESSEN: That is right. The President will be happy to run on the platform as written by the Platform Committee.

Q He has no opinion on the Reagan proposal?

MR. NESSEN: He has no opinion yet on that.

Q What is the President's reaction to the various uncommitted delegates today who came up, in one case an uncommitted who now says he is pledging to Mr. Ford and he believed that Mr. Ford would pick a Ford-Reagan ticket?

MR. NESSEN: As I told you and a lot of other people, Phil, nobody knows who the President is going to pick. The President doesn't know yet who he is going to pick.

Q I guess my question is, does he see a new emphasis, or new pressure, to get Reagan on the second spot?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard him talk about anything like that.

Q Is the President aware of Ogilvie's accusation that Reagan people offered bribes to two Illinois delegates to vote for Reagan on the first ballot and, if so, does he have any reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I am told that is being handled in some regular manner. I think somebody mentioned the FBI and the Justice Department.

Q Is he aware of a statement by Reagan this afternoon -- I think it was made before the Young Republicans for Reagan -- that there was no way on earth he would accept the Vice Presidency?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know if he is aware of that or not.

THE PRESS: Thank you.