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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:06 P.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 28, 1976

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I think you know about the meeting with the Congressional leaders, and I guess they talked to you afterward.

Q We would like to know a little bit more.

MR. NESSEN: Like what? I only stayed for the first part and then had to go to another meeting.

Q They were so vague.

MR. NESSEN: On what, Rhodesia? The first thing that happened was the President opened the meeting and praised Dr. Kissinger for his mission and said, "It is far from settled." He told the members that they would be kept informed of each step from now on.

Q Is that a quote, "It is far from settled"?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Then George Bush gave an intelligence briefing -- some of the intelligence judgments which provided the background for the President's effort in Southern Africa.

Q For what?

MR. NESSEN: For the President's decision to make the effort in Southern Africa.

Q What was that process?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you the assessments that led to it, Helen.

Q Does that statement that "it is far from settled" constitute a qualification of his statement last Friday "A threat to world peace has been eased through the skillful and energetic diplomacy we have pursued"?

MR. NESSEN: No, it has been eased, but it is far from settled.

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Q It has been eased. Well, how eased has it been, Ron? The black presidents have rejected part of it and Smith has rejected part of it.

MR. NESSEN: Let me go on and tell you about Dr. Kissinger's report to the meeting and maybe that will answer some of your questions.

Then Dr. Kissinger said -- I am going to paraphrase, if you don't mind -- he said basically without this effort it could have turned into a very serious military confrontation fairly soon.

Q This is Kissinger talking?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Then he said that he had seen stories written that the black African presidents had rejected the plan. That is not correct. The black African countries have agreed and have accepted the basic principles. Some negotiation is needed on the details, but he said -- and this is a quote, if you would like to use it -- "The breakthrough has basically occurred."

Then there was some other material about negotiations will be going on, public statements and private statements will be going on, over the next few weeks. Then he said, "The situation is essentially on track."

Then the President thanked him for his report and reviewed the options that he felt he had. He said that he could either send Dr. Kissinger on this mission and attempt to help settle the situation or do nothing, and the President said that when he examined the option of doing nothing, he felt that the outcome of doing nothing would have been, first of all, to have increased outside foreign intervention -- that would have increased -- and then he said, "There would be an absolute inevitable bloody confrontation."

Q Ron, when he talked about the outcome of doing nothing would have been an increase in foreign intervention, does that mean foreign intercontinental Soviet intervention?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't spell that out, but I think based on recent events in Angola that is what he meant.

Q Meaning Soviet intervention?

MR. NESSEN: And Cuban. But, he didn't spell that out in the meeting.

Q I assume Mr. Bush has been fully backed up, by the reception --

MR. NESSEN: Well, it started off with the President asking George to give the intelligence judgments which led to the entire mission, and yes, they did back it up.

The President said if he had taken the do-nothing option you would have had an increase in foreign intervention and you would have had the "absolutely inevitable bloody confrontation."

Then he said, "We are a long way from a final conclusion, but we have made a substantial amount of progress."

The quotation continues. "We are going to make a maximum effort. I am an optimist." Then there were some questions from the members.

Q This is all the President?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q To clarify that one statement of Kissinger, the breakthrough has occurred, does he mean a basic breakthrough or it has almost occurred?

MR. NESSEN: No, in the sense the African presidents have accepted, as he told them, the basic principles, and so has Mr. Smith.

Q Ron, what is the next step for the United States in this negotiation?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I will check. Obviously to continue to help the parties to take the remaining steps, but I will check specifically, or the State Department.

Q Did the President tell the leaders how much money might be involved in a fund to help the Rhodesians?

MR. NESSEN: One of the questions was pretty much that, Fran, from one of the members, I forget who it was. Dr. Kissinger answered the question saying there was the possibility that some kind of trust fund -- he referred to it as a trust fund -- might be set up with both governmental and private companies participating.

The purpose of it would be, first of all, to have business investments in this new -- not new, but under the new majority rule for Rhodesia, or perhaps some sort of insurance for white settlers.

He said, "I hope we can get private companies with interests there to contribute." He said, "None of this is fully worked out," and he mentioned four or five countries that he hoped would contribute to this. He said, "Of course, Congress would have to approve any American involvement."

He spoke of it only in very general terms and pretty much did not carry it beyond what had been said publicly before at the State Department.

Q Which countries, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I ought to mention that since this has not been fully worked out, as he said.

Q Did he cite any businesses that have indicated they want to invest in a new Rhodesia or a new Zambabwe?

MR. NESSEN: He didn't mention the names of specific companies.

Q Business investments for whom? I didn't catch this.

MR. NESSEN: He said, "I hope to get private companies with interests there to contribute."

Q Contribute to what?

MR. NESSEN: To this trust fund, if there is one.

Q Ron, even in concept, without the details being worked out, even in concept, are they supposed to contribute to a fund which would be for business investments or is this to compensate them for the businesses they will have lost, having already invested there?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is to invest in the future growth of the economy in Rhodesia.

Q Is this to compensate settlers?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was not described as a compensation for them, but rather -- well, he referred to it as insurance but didn't spell out exactly what he had in mind.

Q This would be for minority businesses, or just white businesses?

MR. NESSEN: No, just business in Rhodesia. He didn't really elaborate beyond what has been said publicly by the State Department.

Q Will the U.S. Government guarantee investments by private American corporations in this new country?

MR. NESSEN: Henry didn't spell it out, and I know from what he said there and elsewhere that this just is not far enough along the track to describe it in any great detail.

Q The inference, though, of Kissinger's remarks was that on one side insurance for the white settlers, and on the other side capital investments in the new black majority regime?

MR. NESSEN: Certainly so, but in talking about insurance for the white settlers, the implication was not to compensate white settlers who would be leaving, but rather to help encourage the white settlers to stay.

Q Obviously this is a question of risk capital, going into a country where the investment laws at this point certainly would not be known. So, has any thought, can you find out, been given as to whether American companies investing in such a place would be guaranteed investments to any organization other than what already exists?

MR. NESSEN: I will look into it, but my sense is that it is an idea of a possible mechanism that would be needed during the period, but that it has not gone far enough to spell out those specific kinds of answers.

Q What figure was mentioned?

MR. NESSEN: There was no dollar figure mentioned.

Q When you said the basic principles of Kissinger's plan had been accepted, what --

MR. NESSEN: I didn't say the basic principles of the Kissinger plan. I said the basic principles of this movement toward majority rule.

Q What principles have they accepted?

MR. NESSEN: Henry had a very long briefing on Saturday and, of course, the public statements have been issued by those on all sides and I just refer you to those.

Q What was the reaction of the Congressional leaders to Dr. Kissinger's statement?

MR. NESSEN: There was no opportunity to take a vote or anything like that. They asked questions, which he answered and then they moved on to the next subject.

Q Ron, you said there was no dollar figure. Was there any pound figure mentioned?

MR. NESSEN: There was no money figure mentioned.

Q Was one of those countries Great Britain, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Since this is a matter that has not been worked out and is yet to be, I am not going to name the countries.

Q Senator Long said a figure was mentioned but he couldn't remember what it was.

MR. NESSEN: There was no figure -- well, I didn't hear a figure mentioned.

After that, there was a discussion of legislation and at that point I had to leave and go to another meeting. I think the Members talked to you about legislation anyhow.

The Cabinet meeting I think John attended. I didn't attend it because I was in another meeting.

Q What was this other meeting that took you out?

MR. NESSEN: Again, the subject was for Henry to brief the members on his trip. I assume he covered the same ground.

Q That is all they did at the Cabinet meeting?

MR. NESSEN: That is all that was on the agenda. It was a one-item agenda.

Then you have seen the signing of the Land and Water Conservation Fund amendments.

Q Will you take a question on that now or later?

MR. NESSEN: No, Bob, I will take it now.

Q The President brought it up, he pointed out this is the first step in the \$1.5 billion program he proposed at Yellowstone Park on August 29. That appearance in Yellowstone Park cost the Interior Department \$162,900 in overtime pay, and additional expenses -- renting of cars, putting in phones, platforms and all the rest -- coming out of their money.

Since you said that was a trip which the expenses would be picked up, from Washington to Kansas City and back to Washington, by the President Ford Committee, and since this came so soon after the President outlined, within two or three days, that the expanded park proposal was part of his campaign, is the White House going to pick up that bill for \$162,900 or is the President Ford Committee going to pick it up? The bill, I understand, now is low; they have new estimates over at Interior that it will cost even more.

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I am not familiar with that.

Q I asked you about it last week. Could you get the answer to it?

MR. NESSEN: I will endeavor to look into it and see what there is to it.

Q Bob asked you about it last week and I assume asked you to check it. Why are you saying this week you are not familiar with it?

MR. NESSEN: I meant I have not had time to look into it and familiarize myself with it.

Q Will you do that? This is a question of the use of taxpayers' money possibly in a political campaign.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. As I said, I will look into it.

Q Ron, was there any discussion today about economics? The Commerce Department just released its new composite index and it is down, badly down, eight points moved unfavorably, I think.

MR. NESSEN: That was not discussed in either one of the meetings -- actually that was a compilation put out today, as I understand it, of previously released statistics, but it wasn't discussed in either one of these meetings.

Q May I request a response?

MR. NESSEN: This is a compilation of previously released figures. I have not had a chance to look at them in detail.

Q There are some very unfavorable indicators for the winter. I am wondering if there is a plan to change the economic game plan at all?

MR. NESSEN: You mean last winter?

Q This winter.

MR. NESSEN: These are reports, as I understand it, of what has transpired in the past and not a forecasting.

Q It is a forecasting of coming months.

MR. NESSEN: That is not my understanding.

Q That is what leading indicators are saying, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The term "leading indicators" means the leading or main indicators, and not looking ahead, as I understand it.

Q The word "indicators" refers to indicating what they expect to happen in the future, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is it indicates what has happened in the past.

Q Are you saying indicators don't mean anything?

MR. NESSEN: No, I am saying today was a compilation of previously released statistics.

Q Is the President going to respond at all to allegations that his Michigan campaign finances are under investigation?

MR. NESSEN: No more so than we have up to now.

Q He hasn't responded.

MR. NESSEN: I thought we had.

Q Did he talk to the Attorney General about that today?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q At the Cabinet meeting?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q At any other time?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Why don't we finish the announcements before plunging into this area. I have a feeling it will take some time.

As you know, the President is meeting with the Foreign Minister of Germany today, and I expect we will have a short written statement on how that meeting went and, as I indicated, there will be some other meetings later in the week.

For instance, tomorrow in the morning the President will meet with Arnaldo Forlani, the Foreign Minister of Italy. He also is in the United States to attend the General Assembly session.

Q Do you know what party he is in, Ron?

Q Will you spell his name?

MR. NESSEN: F-o-r-l-a-n-i. He is formerly the Defense Minister of Italy. He does not hold any position in the Christian Democratic Party at the moment. At one time, he was the Secretary General of the party.

Q What other foreign ministers or officials of foreign governments will he be meeting with this week?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a full list to give out now, but as I indicated I think to the pool last night, Foreign Minister Gromyko, I expect, will be in and probably the French Foreign Minister. I don't have the exact times for those, but I expect they will come in later in the week.

Q Is this part of the preparation for the debates?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, it is similar to the situation in the fall of 1974 and the fall of 1975 and those are the only two years I am familiar with, but I think it has gone on previously, too, that when the General Assembly session meets and there are foreign ministers and prime ministers and other foreign officials, many of them take the opportunity to come to Washington and talk to the President.

For instance, in 1974, just prior to and during the UN General Assembly session, Kurt Waldheim came twice to see President Ford; the Foreign Minister of India; Foreign Minister Gromyko of the Soviet Union -- this is all in 1974, say, mid-September to mid-October -- Foreign Minister of Argentina; Foreign Minister Callaghan of Great Britain; Adam Malik, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia; Hans Genscher, who is in today, also came in 1974 during the session; and the then Foreign Minister of France.

Sorry if I bore you, Dick, but I saw some suggestions that these men were invited this week, and Phil raised the question of whether this was put on as a preparation for the debate.

Q I am not indicating I am bored by yawning. I yawn constantly. I will yawn in the future. I have yawned at every press conference I have ever been in unless there is something wildly exciting going on, and I will continue to yawn. If you want to pay for an operation to get rid of my yawning, that is your business. But, Ron, I am going to yawn and yawn and yawn and yawn, and I may even nap. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: All right, in 1974 -- I stopped with the --

Q Since I asked the question, I would like to ask it one more time, and just answer yes or no. Are they coming in as part of the preparation? I don't want a list of anything; just yes or no.

MR. NESSEN: What he is doing is what he has done in the previous two years he has been President during the General Assembly session, which is --

Q The answer is no?

MR. NESSEN: What he is doing, he is doing what he has done in previous --

Q You won't say yes?

MR. NESSEN: There was no debate in 1974 or 1975 so obviously it is unrelated.

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Q Are those the end of your announcements?

MR. NESSEN: Let me just check.

For the California trip, I don't actually have the starting date other than to say it will be on the 4th or 5th. I don't have it nailed down as to the exact date. At this time there are no stops planned on the way. It will be a straight flight out, and I don't have the return date for you yet.

Q Why are you making the announcement?

MR. NESSEN: I am making it because a couple of people have said over the past few days when are you going to California. The answer is the 4th or 5th.

Q Do you know where the President is staying?

MR. NESSEN: In San Francisco?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The last time I heard they had not settled on a hotel yet.

Q You don't know when we are going and where we are staying, but you are making the announcement?

Q How about Texas?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything further on travel to announce today.

Q This announcement indicates the President is going out on the 5th of October and is not the case he is coming back on Saturday morning after spending Friday night in Dallas, Texas? Can't you give us the information that has become practically a matter of common knowledge?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I don't know that it is common knowledge. If it is common knowledge, the first is not certain and the second is definitely wrong.

Q He is not going to Dallas?

MR. NESSEN: He is not spending whatever night you said it was in Dallas, or any night in Dallas, under present plans.

Q Is this a campaign trip to the West Coast that you are announcing or just a trip for the debates?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. It is a trip to the debates, but there will be other stops and I would call them campaign stops, including the fund-raiser out there, which many of you know about, on October 7.

Q Where is that?

MR. NESSEN: There will be nationwide fund-raisers all over the country that night to raise money for the RNC as opposed to the PFC. Many leaders of the party will participate in different cities and the President will do his part in the L.A. fund-raiser and then it will be piped to the other fund-raisers by television.

Q His part will be a speech?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, and to stay for dinner.

Q Do you expect him to see Reagan in California?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I haven't heard of any plan to do that.

Q Ron, are you finished with your announcements?

Q Is Ronald Reagan speaking from the same platform?

MR. NESSEN: No, I thought Reagan was doing his at another dinner. I don't have all the details yet.

Q Are you ready for questions?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I am ready for questions.

Q Could you say whether it is the President's view that, if Congress were to oppose the sale of Maverick missiles to Saudi Arabia, it would jeopardize our relationship with Saudi Arabia and they might not oppose price rises or boycotts in the OPEC.

MR. NESSEN: Would you say that again?

Q I will try. Is it the President's view that, if the Congress were to oppose the sale of Maverick missiles to Saudi Arabia, the United States would lose an ally within OPEC opposing price rises and a possible boycott? That is approximately what I said.

MR. NESSEN: I have not brought myself up to date on that situation, Marilyn. I don't have an answer for you.

Q It is happening today, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: Let me find out what I can. I did not look into that situation this morning.

Q Do you have anything to say on the Maverick missiles?

MR. NESSEN: No, I do not.

I didn't look into the Maverick missile situation. Let me look it up and get back to you.

Q What about the legislation on the Arab boycott? Do you have anything to say on that?

MR. NESSEN: Nothing new on that. The Administration has been testifying up there and Administration officials have been making their public statements about that legislation.

Q The President said he was satisfied with the language.

MR. NESSEN: When did he say that?

Q In Philadelphia, or somewhere, he told the Jewish leaders that.

MR. NESSEN: That he is satisfied with which language?

Q The language of the Arab boycott part of the tax bill.

Q Is that so, Ron?

Q Including that is what we were told by officials of the Administration who attended the meeting.

MR. NESSEN: That he told the Jewish leaders he was satisfied with the language of the bill?

Q Yes.

Q When is he going to sign that bill?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, that doesn't exactly track with my understanding. You know the overall position, but I would like an opportunity to check it.

Q Will you, please?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q We reported what they said.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

Q Can you tell us whether the President made it a practice to accept hospitality trips from lobbyists other than from Mr. Whyte?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I indicated last week -- I forget what day, Wednesday or Thursday -- that over the years the President had accepted invitations as an avid golfer, that over the years he had accepted invitations to play golf at various clubs from friends and others and that he had also invited people to play golf with him at his clubs.

Q Do you have any idea on how many occasions he did that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't. You know, over a period of 25 years of living in Washington, I just can't give you a count on it.

Q Let's put it this way. Some details have come out about the President's golfing trips with Mr. Whyte of U.S. Steel. Now, specifically, did the President go on golfing trips and have his expenses paid for him by Mr. Markley of the Ford Motor Company?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any, but I have not checked specifically.

Q Will you check?

MR. NESSEN: If I can.

Q Did he go on golfing trips and have his golfing expenses paid by Mr. Zoll of Libby-Owens Ford?

MR. NESSEN: I haven't heard of any.

Q Will you check?

MR. NESSEN: I will. As I said last week, Jim, let me make it clear -- I said last Wednesday or Thursday that over the years the President, as an avid golfer, had accepted invitations to play golf at different clubs around the country and, in turn, had invited people to play golf at his clubs.

Q Are you confirming in response to his question that over the years the President has accepted expenses paid by different corporations and so forth? This is the question, really.

MR. NESSEN: I said last Wednesday or Thursday, I forget who asked the question, that as an avid golfer over the years the President has accepted invitations from various people to play.

Q Not only U.S. Steel?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q From other corporations?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but I said that last week.

Q Can we narrow this down a little bit? Apparently there was a bill passed by the Congress concerning Congressional ethics. Were these invitations prior to that bill? Does he in retrospect look upon these as in violation of that law? Did he accept them after that law was passed? Those are five questions I wonder if you could track down for us?

MR. NESSEN: I think I can answer your questions now, or some of the five, anyway.

As I said last week, this occurred over the years because he is and was an avid golfer, so some of these golf games took place before 1969, was it --

Q I thought it was 1971.

MR. NESSEN: -- and some took place afterwards. The ones that took place afterwards, obviously he would not have accepted the invitations or invited others to play at his club if he felt there was anything wrong with it. I said that last week in specific reference to the U.S. Steel-Bill Whyte golf games.

But, it certainly applies more generally to some of the other golf games. So, that is true, as I said, in specific reference to Bill Whyte, but it also applies generally that the President, as an avid golfer, does not consider a golf game -- I forget the exact wording -- a gift of substantial value.

I did say that last week in reference to Bill Whyte and it applies more generally to what every other golf games he made.

Q How about the transportation to and from, and all of that? Is that of substantial value?

MR. NESSEN: Sometimes it was him driving up. I don't know all the details of all the different ones.

Q Did he put it on his income tax?

MR. NESSEN: His income tax was certainly reviewed by the IRS at the time of his House Judiciary Committee hearings.

Q Did they know of these trips?

MR. NESSEN: I assume they did, Phil.

Q Around the country? How far around the country?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know of any games he played -- I know of one time he went to Hawaii -- I think Phil was with him on that trip, I was -- when he was Vice President, and he played his own way at Mona Kea Golf Club.

Q My question is this: The President, as you say, would not have done something if he felt it was wrong. Has he, since these questions have been raised, asked any lawyer to read the law and to see whether in fact this may have been a violation even though he didn't think at the time it was wrong?

MR. NESSEN: He has not, no.

Q Do you know if Dwight Eisenhower or Jimmy Carter have taken similar trips, golf trips, as a guest?

MR. NESSEN: Only what I have read in the paper, Les, and I guess it was published fairly extensively about the Lockheed plane or the Coca-Cola plane, or both, that Carter used quite extensively at one period. But, I don't know that of my own knowledge. I only read that in the papers.

Q Ron, how would all of the investigators who looked into Mr. Ford during the Vice Presidential confirmation hearings know about this, and the IRS people? How would they know about it if he didn't report it?

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

Q I mean we are asking whether or not he reported these as gifts on his income tax filings.

MR. NESSEN: I am not a tax attorney and I am not sure --

Q You don't have to be to answer the question. Did he put these down on his income tax return?

MR. NESSEN: The reason I say I am not a tax attorney, Phil, is I don't know whether it is required in the tax law to show golf trips and so forth as income or equivalent of income. I just don't know that. If it is not required, then, of course, there would be no need to do it.

Q Ron, did the President know or was he instrumental in any way in getting a \$16,000 a year job for Mr. Whyte's son, Roger, on Mr. Rockefeller's staff?

MR. NESSEN: I think the Vice President's office has answered that about a week ago.

Q They haven't answered anything about whether Mr. Ford had any knowledge of it.

MR. NESSEN: I thought the answer they gave was that he had proved himself as a volunteer to be highly efficient and he was hired on his own merits.

Q He was recommended to the Vice President's office and I am trying to find out who it was that recommended him for a possible paying job.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Are you saying the President didn't know anything about this?

MR. NESSEN: I said I don't know whether the President knew anything about it. I said the Vice President's office said he was hired on his own merits.

Q I am asking you to find out if the President knew or was in any way instrumental in getting him that job.

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

Q You said there were other corporations involved that paid for some of these golfing trips, transportation and hotel, and so forth. You were asked specifically about the Ford Motor Company and Libby-Owens Ford, and you said you didn't know.

MR. NESSEN: I said I didn't know on either one of those.

Q Do you know how many corporations, and do you know the names of any of them?

MR. NESSEN: I know some of the golf courses he played. I know, for instance, the Firestone Golf Course, which is owned by the Firestone employees. He has played on that course. I don't know the circumstances of that.

I know he played on a course owned by the employees of Alcoa, I believe, and another course I believe is a Bethlehem Steel course somewhere. These are three I know about.

Q Are you trying to suggest the employees invited him and not the corporation chiefs?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the details of each and every golf game of his over a period of 26 years. I know some of the people he has invited to play at his club as golfers do, I understand.

Q Could you tell us some of those?

MR. NESSEN: I had the list last week but gave it back to the person it belongs to. I could get it and run through it for you if you want to.

Q Could we get the dates of Alcoa, Firestone and Bethlehem?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. Here is the reason: The President is an avid golfer. He played golf with some regularity over the period of 26 years he was in Congress. He accepted invitations to play golf at people's clubs, as is customary, I understand, and in turn invited people to play golf at his club. I mentioned these three because I am aware of these three.

Q After 1969?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the dates of any of them.

Q Carter has now injected this into the campaign, and I am sure you are aware of his comment -- there is no way you can straighten out the Federal bureaucracy if you are running around playing golf with a bunch of lobbyists all the time. What does the White House have to say in response to that?

MR. NESSEN: I will fall back on my rule, Bob, of not commenting on campaign oratory.

Q Ron, did you say Governor Carter had accepted similar airplane rides?

MR. NESSEN: I read in the newspapers about the Lockheed airplane he flew in and the Coca-Cola airplane he flew in, but my knowledge comes completely from the newspapers. I haven't made any kind of research.

Q We can take it then that no Federal agency has looked into Governor Carter's activities?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea and no way of knowing.

Q The other day when I brought this up, you suggested maybe somebody should look into my CBS expense account.

MR. NESSEN: You know I didn't mean that.

Q I wanted to point out at CBS we have very strict rules. I couldn't go play golf if they paid for it.

MR. NESSEN: It was a bad example I used.

Q I just wonder how long has the President felt it would be improper to have somebody pick up the tab when he goes to play golf, just since the new rules have gone into effect?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean?

Q How long has he declined to accept hospitality from Firestone and from these other people, the people that paid for his golfing vacations, U.S. Steel?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that they were golfing vacations or an afternoon of golf. I just haven't done complete research on every golf game over 26 years.

Q You said last week one was a long weekend and one was a weekend.

MR. NESSEN: That was U.S. Steel, Bill Whyte. What I said last week was over the years the President has accepted golf games and has been the host at golf games.

Q Would he still do that? Does he still think it is correct to do that?

MR. NESSEN: It is sort of hypothetical now.

Q Has he done it since he has been President?

MR. NESSEN: Just an example that comes to my mind is playing at the Jackie Gleason Inverrary, whatever it is, in Florida, and I don't know whether Jackie Gleason paid for that, the golf course, or the President.

Q You mean for going down there?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, no. The President went down there ---

Q Are you talking about picking up expenses for the President to play in their golf tournament?

MR. NESSEN: Somebody said, what happens when he plays golf now, who pays for it, do companies still pay for it? I am trying to think of the times he has played golf since he has been President. One that came to my mind was the Jackie Gleason Inverrary. He went down and played in the Lee Elder tournament in Virginia. I don't know whether the sponsors pick up the greens fees, the caddy fees or whether he pays it out of his pocket.

Q Who picks up the transportation fees? The sponsors or the President?

MR. NESSEN: The trip to Florida, he played golf while he was there for another event, if I recall. I don't have all the details of it.

Q Who picks up the transportation fees?

Q You are not trying to suggest in any way that there is some tie-up between the sponsorship and the promotion of the tournament and he somehow gets something out of it, are you?

MR. NESSEN: No. I am trying to answer a question -- what is the rule now? I don't know what the rule is now because, for instance, I thought of this tournament and I don't know how his greens fees and locker room fees and so forth were taken care of.

Q On those examples you mentioned, did the companies pay the lodging and the food costs as Mr. Whyte did on these weekends?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that there was any lodging or food costs or just an afternoon of golf.

Q Ron, it appears to me that you have done very little checking into specifics to answer our questions on this thing. I am wondering, therefore, if you feel that all of this -- that we are making a big thing out of this, the public is making a big thing out of this, and it shouldn't be involved in the campaign?

MR. NESSEN: I shouldn't make those judgments, Phil. My effort has been to try to get some information. I volunteered last Wednesday or Thursday the President had accepted other golf games in addition to the Bill Whyte games. I brought it up myself. I volunteered it, and apparently some people didn't know it or didn't get enough information about it last week when I mentioned it, so I was asked additional questions today.

Phil, it is truly, I think, difficult to go back 26 years and to reconstruct each and every golf game over 26 years, both those at which the President has been the guest and where he has been the host.

My own view is that there are so many things to do around here each day that I truly have not and really can't see how I could reconstruct 26 years of golf games.

Q How about since 1968, since the House rule --

MR. NESSEN: There are no records where you can go and say, here is where the President played golf for the last 6 years.

Q There is a place, Ron -- the President. If a fellow gets a round-trip ticket to go from Washington to Seattle to play golf, he generally remembers that. If you lived here in Alexandria and somebody gave you a round-trip ticket to Seattle to play golf, you would remember that. The fellow that took the ticket would remember, if he did, and that is Mr. Ford. Did you ask him that?

MR. NESSEN: Last week prior to Wednesday or Thursday, whenever I mentioned it and said the President had accepted other golf games and had been host at other golf games, obviously I talked to him. He said sure. He said, I played at this place and that place. That is what I reported to you.

Q We are not raising a question about whether somebody bought him a bag of Fritos when he was on the putting green. We are asking about airplane tickets and things like that.

MR. NESSEN: The answer, Bob, is, if there is one, that obviously I talked to the President about this and I did before I mentioned last week the fact there had been other golf games where he was host and other golf games where he was guest. Some of the clubs I mentioned here today are clubs he recalls playing at. But the President, too, doesn't have -- you know, he can't just come forth and say beginning in 1948 I played here and here and here.

Q Why can't he?

MR. NESSEN: Phil, he just --

Q I tell you, if I bought a fellow a ticket, a round-trip ticket to go to Disney World or somewhere, I would want him to remember it. That is why lobbyists do things like that.

MR. NESSEN: You know Bill Whyte is an old personal friend of his.

Q Are you suggesting that these trips to the Bethlemen course, the Alcoa course, and Firestone, that the corporation paid for the President's trips out there, or not? We are not talking about local courses or a course in New Jersey. This takes some more extended travel on his behalf.

MR. NESSEN: Why do you say more extended travel on his behalf?

Q It is further away.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know how far the distance is.

Q Did he give you any indication whether they paid for his way out there?

MR. NESSEN: He doesn't recall. Some he paid for; some he was guest. And, as I say, sometimes he was the host.

Q The question is not who paid the greens fees at each of these places. The question is who put him up while he was there and who got him out there? Is he saying there is a possibility that the corporation in some of these cases paid his way out? When you say he played at other courses, are you saying they paid his expenses while he was there?

MR. NESSEN: He has not sat down and reconstructed every golf game where he was the host or guest over the last 28 years, or since 1968.

Q Has the SEC contacted the White House in its investigation into all of this?

MR. NESSEN: Not to my knowledge, it hasn't.

Q Couldn't we just try and ask for information, if you could get it for us, since 1968, and what the view is, legal and Presidential?

MR. NESSEN: I think I have given you the view, which is he wouldn't have asked people to play golf with him or accepted their hospitality if he thought it was wrong.

Q What do the lawyers think?

MR. NESSEN: I told you before he had not asked any.

Q Does he still feel he did nothing wrong?

MR. NESSEN: I said that last week, yes.

Q Could we get a White House lawyer's view on that?

MR. NESSEN: Why, Marilyn?

Q Because we are asking for it.

MR. NESSEN: I can relay your interest to them.

Q Otherwise we might have to get some other lawyer's view on it, and you might not like that as well.

MR. NESSEN: Maybe not.

Q Does he feel other Government officials should be guided by this example, like a purchasing agent?

MR. NESSEN: Let's stick to what I know about and what you would like me to find out about it.

Q I think that is a reasonable question. He is the leader of our Government. Does he feel this is an example that ought to be followed or for some reason it ought to be distinguished and set aside, set apart?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will stick to facts and specifics and the interpretations ought to be made by others.

Q Some Pentagon officials have been reprimanded for accepting similar --

MR. NESSEN: That was called to my attention last week, Dick, and I said then that I wasn't going to draw any conclusions or inferences; that I was going to try to stick to the facts as I could dig them up.

Q Could you explain to us how this differs from Rockwell International inviting someone from the Pentagon to a hunting lodge for a weekend, for which people at the Pentagon have been reprimanded?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is the same question that has come around several different ways, and I just don't think I can make the kinds of judgments you want me to make. I have given you the President's view, which is as a golfer, an avid golfer he has been the host to people at his club, Burning Tree and others, and he has been the guest of people at their clubs. He never considered a golf game, as I said last week, a gift of substantial value, and he did not feel at the time it was wrong or else he wouldn't have done it. And he believes he has lived up to the spirit and intent of the Code.

Q Have any of the White House people, for example, his senior staff people, accepted golf in the same spirit?

MR. NESSEN: I don't play golf. I am an avid tennis player.

Q There must be others who are avid golfers, or tennis players, or bowlers.

MR. NESSEN: These are busy days and I am trying to keep up with the questioning in various areas, but this is one area I have not obviously polled the senior staff on.

Q You are not up on Arab boycotts or on Maverick missiles or on this. We are not getting any answers.

Q Ron, you may be up on one thing; that is, some Republican Congressmen have expressed concern about the Special Prosecutor's probe into alleged mishandlings of President Ford's campaign funds in Michigan. Has the President said anything at all about this? Does it concern him or bother him or what?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to say beyond what we have said before because nothing has changed since I said this before.

Q My understanding is that you didn't make any comments before. Maybe I am wrong. I wasn't there.

MR. NESSEN: I think if you check you will find I have talked about it at length and cited the outcome of the House Judiciary Committee investigations. It was very thorough at the time the President was nominated.

Q Is the President at all concerned that some of his Republican colleagues are concerned? For example, one was quoted as saying "Should I campaign for this guy, or should I go and run and hide for the next five or six weeks?"

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to add to what I said before.

Q Will the President make any move before the election to clear the air?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, since nothing new has happened since the last time we talked about this, I don't have anything further to say on it.

Q Are you saying the President isn't even trying to find out what this is all about?

MR. NESSEN: As I have said before, as Dick said on the plane the other night -- I tell you one way to put it is all we know about it is what we read in the newspapers.

Q Speaking of newspapers, do you feel Sunday's edition of the Washington Star contained any errors or distortions?

MR. NESSEN: I don't make it a practice to comment on news stories, Les.

Q All news stories? Ron, if something was wrong with that, I would be most interested. It dealt with a very significant story. You have no objections to any of that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't make it a practice to comment on news stories.

Q Could I pursue this further? You said all the White House knows is what they read in the newspapers. Isn't there a definite concern on the President's part that he could go into an election with this over his head unless it is cleared up?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, as Dick said the other night -- you know, to ask -- well, it is the same question I raised last week. What you are suggesting is somehow the White House asked that the Special Prosecutor clear the President when there is nothing to clear him of.

Q I am not asking that. I think you ought to find out -- you could at least ask if there is an investigation going on that concerns him, that he is the target of.

MR. NESSEN: Let me just recall for you some recent history in which the White House contacting or asking supposedly independent investigative arms of the Government was not considered to be the proper thing to do.

Q The Prosecutor's office thinks it's okay to do it.

MR. NESSEN: As Dick says, to ask for that assumes there is a reason to ask, and we have seen no reason to ask.

Q Even in the newspaper stories you see no reason?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, not after the House Judiciary Committee, the FBI, and staff investigators -- and now I see in the newspapers Leon Jaworski said he looked into it and found nothing.

Q You keep saying they failed to turn up this Bill Whyte thing, the business about him taking these golf trips, they failed to turn that up, the FBI probe did. What are you going to say about that?

MR. NESSEN: I have nothing to say about it. I don't know what needs to be said.

Q How can you make a statement like that? You are talking of two things, one of which you are justifying by saying the House Judiciary Committee and the FBI would have turned up something if it was there and on the other hand we are talking about the President taking golf trips at the expense of corporate interests and lobbyists and what not, and they were not turned up, so how can you assume that and not the other?

MR. NESSEN: That assumes that they didn't know about the golf games and there was something wrong with the golf games, which is two large assumptions to make, I think.

Q Ron, has the President admitted or have you admitted in his behalf that the President has accepted any of these golfing invitations since he became Vice President?

MR. NESSEN: I have never been asked, but the answer is no.

Q What was the question, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: John said has the President accepted any golf hospitality from corporations since he became Vice President, and I said to my knowledge he has not.

Q Ron, it seems to me that either at this next debate, if not before it -- and I know the subject matter will be something else, but I can't see why any self-respecting reporter won't ask this question -- but even if not there, at the next debate somebody will ask in essence, at least I hope so, "Mr. President, are your skirts clean?" And I want to know, what is his answer?

Q I don't wear skirts. (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: Bud, look, we are in a difficult position because, as I have said before, all we know is what we read in the paper. The White House hasn't been told anything, hasn't been asked anything. All we know is that in 1973 the House Judiciary Committee and the FBI and the staff of the Congress conducted the most extensive investigation of any public official ever in American history, and I have referred you to the report and you see what the conclusions are and yesterday -- I didn't know this until I read the comments of Jaworski yesterday -- he said he went into this and found nothing.

So, as I said last week, when this first started, or maybe a week before, we are in the very difficult position of having to deny something that nobody has ever charged. I mean, you are saying why won't I stand here and say the President's skirts are clear. That assumes, as Dick said the other night, that there needs to be such an assertion made. I don't know of any charge that is on the record. I don't know of any reason why I have to stand here and deny something that has not been charged.

Q But you are indicating a lack of curiosity that these stories day after day, that the President isn't even curious as to what the hell is happening.

MR. NESSEN: That is it. All we know is what we read in the newspapers or see on the television or hear on the radio.

Q Ron, do you know anything from asking the President this question? Is this a taboo issue? In the morning staff meetings, do you bring it up and say there is a lot of curiosity there in the press room?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President is very aware of it.

Q Ron, let me ask you a question for the record, if I may. Since this thing is likely to go on and since there is always the possibility of fuller disclosures, without any reference to the House Judiciary Committee, without any reference to the stories that have appeared, I ask this just to you directly -- did the President at any time in his career in the House of Representatives convert any campaign funds to his personal use or to political uses, or other uses for which they had not been given?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, you know I am not going to answer that question. As I said last week, I wouldn't answer it because it suggests there is the need to answer it, that something like that has been charged.

Q The charge was listed in a newspaper article.

Q May I please get back my question before I was interrupted? Would you answer the question? Do you bring it up in staff meetings to the President of the United States?

MR. NESSEN: I think my own discussions and others' discussions with the President are not a matter that really is the subject for the briefing. I have always said since I came here that I speak for the President.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:01 P.M. EDT)