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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 12:02 P.M. EDT

DECEMBER 11, 1974

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President met for an hour and 10 minutes with the bipartisan Congressional leadership. Have you seen a list of the people who were there? Do you know who was there from the White House?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: This is the order in which they were sitting around. It is not the order of their status at the White House because I am at the bottom -- Seidman, Armstrong, Eberle, Ash, Korologos, Hartmann, Friedersdorf, Rumsfeld, Cole, Scowcroft, Buchen, and last, but not least, me.

I can give you a little readout if you would like to hear it. Some of you talked, I guess, outside to some of the leaders.

There were about six topics discussed. Number one was a very brief discussion of the inauguration of Vice-President Designate Rockefeller when the House has completed action, whether to have it at the Capitol or the White House, and what day to have it, and no decisions were made.

The second topic discussed was the Trade Reform Bill, and the President said, "No legislation has a higher priority. We will do anything to expedite and facilitate its passage. We will cooperate in any way. It has number one priority."

The third item discussed was the Foreign Assistance Bill. The President remarked on the 60-day extension of aid to Turkey that is in the Senate version of the bill, and he said, "If that amendment is offered in the House, it would be extremely helpful."

He went on to review the reasons why he believes the aid should be extended to Turkey for that period. I think you are all familiar with the reasons.

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The next topic of discussion was very brief, and he simply told the Members that he was going to Martinique on Saturday to talk to the French President, and he said that this followed what he described as highly successful meetings with Trudeau and Schmidt, and that was about all.

The fifth item discussed was the economy. The President said, "We are constantly reviewing our economic problems. We are not going to give up our fight against inflation, and we are going to continue to fight recession. Our October 8 program was finely tuned to deal with both of these problems."

Q End of quote?

MR. NESSEN: There is one other partial quote here. "We are continually reviewing and updating our program."

Then some of the Members had some thoughts about the economy, and the President said, "We need to increase consumer confidence."

Then the Members talked about specific economic problems in their States or districts, such as the auto industry, high interest rates, problems in the housing industry.

The President, at the end of the economic discussion, urged the Congress to pass before it goes home the public jobs and unemployment compensation legislation with a trigger mechanism.

Q Did he say how much money?

MR. NESSEN: No, the dollar figure was not discussed.

The sixth item -- and I think this was brought up by one of the Members -- was wage and price controls. The President said, "There is no need for either standby or mandatory wage and price controls."

Q Ron, who brought that up?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall, Bob.

Q Would you take a question on the economy?

MR. NESSEN: Let me finish what he said here on the economy. I think that is the last point as a matter of fact.

The President said, "We recognize we have a problem with the economy. As Democrats and Republicans, we should work together to solve the problem. There should be a moratorium on politics while we work together on solving our economic problems. I hope we can have a high degree of cooperation and a minimum amount of politics."

Those are all my notes on the Congressional leadership meeting.

Q Was there any Democratic response to that last plea for a more bipartisan attitude?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather have you talk to the Speaker and the other Democrats, Tom, yourself instead of my giving their views.

The next event this morning was a meeting by the President with his economic advisors to discuss tonight's speech. The President is meeting now with Administration officials as a part of this series of meetings to prepare the State of the Union message. The subject of today's meeting is social security.

At 12:30 this afternoon the President will meet with the Executive Committee of the Trilateral Commission, which is currently meeting in Washington.

Do you want some background on the Trilateral Commission, or don't you care?

Q Could you sum it up very briefly?

MR. NESSEN: The Trilateral Commission was formed in 1972 on the basis of a proposal by David Rockefeller to bring some of the good minds in the world together to discuss problems of the future. There are about 180 members.

The President is not meeting with all the members today. He is meeting with the Executive Committee, but all together the Commission has 180 members, who are mostly business and academic leaders from North America, Western Europe, and Japan.

There have been two previous meetings before this one in Washington, one in Tokyo in 1972, October of that year, and in Brussels in June of 1974. Actually, we have some press kits in the Press Office to give you some more information on the group. The President is meeting today specifically with the Executive Committee to hear their views on the critical international problems which are shared by North America, Western Europe, and Japan.

Q Ron, would it be fair to characterize that as a pro-Arab group?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, I have not heard anything like that at all, Bob.

Q Was David Rockefeller there?

Q Who was in the meeting today with the President?

MR. NESSEN: There is a large number, but David Rockefeller is there. We are going to post this. It looks to me maybe 25 people are there.

Q. There is a report on them in the Post this morning, Ron, which I didn't read completely, but I think they said they differed with Secretary Kissinger's \$25 billion funds proposal for consuming nations and that kind of thing, and policy difference. Do you have anything along the lines of any different viewpoint?

MR. NESSEN: I tell you, I just have not kept up with this group's recommendations very much, and I don't know what their policy is.

At two o'clock this afternoon the President is going to hold another meeting to continue to make decisions on 1976 budget proposals.

Tonight the President will leave the White House at about 8:55 to go to the Business Council, and should be back here about 10:00.

We will take a travel pool, and there will be open coverage of the President's remarks there.

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The meeting tomorrow with the auto makers and Leonard Woodcock is at 9:30.

Incidentally, yesterday somebody asked me the genesis of the meeting, and I may have given you the wrong impression if I didn't indicate that the President initiated the meeting.

From Ford will be Fred Secrest. He is the Executive Vice President, Operation Staffs. of the Ford Motor Company, and Lee A. Iacocca, the President of the Ford Motor Company.

From General Motors, Thomas A. Murphy, the Chairman of the Board, and Oscar Lundin, the Vice Chairman.

From American Motors, Roy Chapin, Chairman of the Board, and John Secrest. He is the group Vice President, Corporate Staff.

From Chrysler, Lynn Townshend, who is Chairman of the Board, and John Ford, who is Vice President of Administration.

From the United Auto Workers, Leonard Woodcock, who is the President, and Stephen Schlossberg, who is the General Counsel.

Finally, we are still trying to line up the briefing for you tomorrow on the Martinique trip, but I don't have anything to tell you right now. We will have the press books for you tomorrow with schedules and background information and so forth.

Q The briefing will be tomorrow, not Friday?

MR. NESSEN: I will let you know when we have it worked out.

Q What about the advance text for tonight?

MR. NESSEN: It will probably be in the sevenish area, somewhere around there.

Q What draft are we now on?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what draft we are on, Tom. All the President's speeches are carefully written and they always go through a number of drafts. There is nothing unusual about the number of drafts, and I frankly don't know what number draft it is.

Q Ron, when you responded in the sevenish area, what were you responding to?

MR. NESSEN: When the text will be available for tonight.

Q Can you tell us anything more about what the speech may contain in view of the fact that apparently the President wanted to talk with the advisers this morning before?

MR. NESSEN: I must say I am a little bit disturbed at the idea that has gotten around that this is a major economic speech. I looked back at my briefing the other day to make sure I didn't give that impression, and I didn't give that impression. I don't know where it came from.

It is a speech to the Business Council, businessmen. He is obviously going to talk on the economy. I think you are building it up more than was justified by anything I said.

Q Any definite steps to change the economy or fine-tune it in any way?

MR. NESSEN: Tom, I have not seen the completed speech yet, and I cannot really give you what the contents of it are.

Q Ron, you are quoted in the Star-News today as saying in New York that "The President has given up hope that Congress will pass the 5 percent surtax." Is that correct?

MR. NESSEN: The President still believes that Congress ought to act in a responsible way and pass the surtax to pay for some of the steps that are needed to help people who have lost their jobs. By the same token, he is a realist and given the fact that there is not much time left in this Congress, I think realistically you would have to say that the chances are small that Congress will pass the surtax in this session.

Q That is not answering the question. The question is, did you say that the President has given up hope?

Q But realitically the chances are slim. That is not really answering the question, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: The President has not given up his feeling that Congress should be responsible in passing a bill to pay for some of these programs. The President is realistic and probably shares the feelings that most of you have that the chances are small that Congress will pass it this year.

Q Ron, I am sorry. May I just quote the sentence. You are quoted as saying --

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you what, Ralph. I would rather say what I am saying and not have newspaper quotes.

Q But this is attributed to you. "Realistically, he does not think it has a chance."

MR. NESSEN: Isn't that what I just said?

Q No.

MR. NESSEN: I said he is realistic and does not think it has much chance of passing before Congress goes home this year.

Q But does he still hope it will be passed next year?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the legislative program for next year, Carroll, so there is no way I can really say whether that is going to be in it or not, but he does feel that Congress ought to be responsible and pass this to pay for the other programs.

Q Are you saying then that the President may not stand by the proposal?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying I have not seen the legislative program for next year, Dick. It has not been drafted yet, so it is hard to say.

Q Do you have any reason to think it may not be?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any reason to feel one way or the other because it has not been written yet.

Q Ron, does not the 31-point program still remain on the President's recommended list until the State of the Union, at least?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, did the President discuss with the leaders any specific ideas for ways of dealing with the economic problems, any tax measures or anything else?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q No specifics at all?

MR. NESSEN: Only the program he has already sent there.

Q Ron, in connection with that, was there a specific discussion on the unemployment assistance bill for which I understand the President is pegged at \$1 billion and the bill itself carries a price tag in the Congress of \$4 billion, and I have been left to understand that there is some room for compromise on the President's part; that is, making it tighter, and Congress coming down a bit. Has there been any discussion on that?

MR. NESSEN: No, there was not any discussion on that at the meeting this morning other than what I told you, which was that --

Q You discussed it in general terms, Ron. Was there a price tag?

MR. NESSEN: The price tag was not discussed there. If you recall, the President's proposal was a \$2.5 billion program. Now we are talking about the jobs program, are we not?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: It was a \$2.5 billion authorization with the money to be available in increments as unemployment increased.

Now, as I understand it, the bill that the House has under consideration today is a \$2 billion program, \$2 billion authorization, so there is not really any inconsistency as far as the dollars are concerned.

As we said before, the President really feels that this is something that Congress should do before it goes home because otherwise you have these people out of work, and the new Congress probably won't get around to this until March or so.

The dollar figure does not seem to me to be inconsistent; it is \$2.5 billion in the President's program, \$2 billion in the figure that is in the House bill.

Q A party this morning told a number of us that the difference was \$1 billion to \$4 billion; that is, the two operating figures are 1 and 4.

MR. NESSEN: All right. The President's was \$2.25, not \$2.5 on the jobs. I think the confusion is you are getting authorizations mixed up with appropriations. There is talk up there about a billion dollar emergency appropriation. The first step in this is to get the bill passed with the authorization in it and then it is likely that the President would ask for an appropriation before this Congress goes home.

Q What about the \$4 billion figure?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what the \$4 billion is.

Q That is the Senate.

MR. NESSEN: Oh, the Senate bill.

Q Isn't that the figure you said the other day was negotiable, a range up to \$4 billion?

MR. NESSEN: The authorization figure is negotiable.

Q Ron, you quoted the President as saying that the trade bill was number one in priority.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q I take that to mean in the context of what it seems likely that Congress will be able to pass this year.

MR. NESSEN: Oh, yes.

Q Not while he is legislating?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Ron, in calling for a moratorium on politics, did the President discuss any example of what he thought was the political discussion, and does he consider Henry Ford's comment on the call for leadership for a tax cut in that context?

MR. NESSEN: I was quoting you in its entirety his remarks on that subject, and no specific examples of what he considered politics came up, and I have never heard him refer to Henry Ford's proposal as being politics.

Q Ron, some Congressmen and Senators are representing what President Ford will do on the strip-mining bill. Has he indicated to anyone on the Hill directly or indirectly whether he plans to sign or veto it?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, he has not because he has not decided yet.

Q Ron, Congressman Anderson is quoted as saying that the President has not ruled out anything as far as proposals on the economy, and specifically that includes has not ruled out asking for a tax increase.

MR. NESSEN: You mean he said that after the meeting this morning?

Q That Anderson said that after the meeting this morning, yes.

MR. NESSEN: It was not discussed at the meeting this morning.

Q Ron, you said a while ago about the speech that some people had built it up as a major economic address. Does that mean it is not going to be a major economic address?

MR. NESSEN: It means I have not read it yet, Bob, but at this moment, unless you have read it or other people have read it and know more about it than I do, there is no way that I can tell because I have not read it yet.

Q Ron, you indicated the other day that on energy and such related matters we are not going to get any decisions until after all this process of working meetings and so forth has passed. Has that changed?

MR. NESSEN: On energy?

Q On energy, which is somewhat of a key to the whole economic thing, too. Are there not going to be any decisions announced in this area until say after Christmas, the first of the year, or is there something likely or possible?

MR. NESSEN: Isn't what we said the other day was that the timetable called for him to announce the comprehensive energy policy in the State of the Union Speech? I don't know anything to change that, Bill.

Q How about in the economic bill?

MR. NESSEN: We have not changed our mind about that. When the unemployment figures came out the other day we said as any new decisions are made we will announce them.

Q Do you expect any to be announced tonight?

Q Do you expect an economic announcement in the next couple weeks then?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to get in the business of ruling in or out. I am just saying as they are made they will be announced, Bill.

Q I just want to be sure I didn't get the wrong impression. We are talking about this surtax and you said he is realistic about it, the chances being small this year, but then you declined to say that it would be in the legislative program for next year, leaving me with the impression that you thought it might be dead forever.

MR. NESSEN: I hope I didn't leave that impression with you, Bob. What I said was that the legislative package for next year has not been drawn up yet, so how would I know whether it is or not.

Q If it has not been drawn up, and you don't know whether he is going to continue to push it next year, then the only impression that one can come away with is that it is in serious doubt that he is going to push it any more.

MR. NESSEN: If I were writing the story I would not leap to that conclusion. The legislative program has not been put together yet. Now when it is put together it may be in there.

Q But it may not be?

MR. NESSEN: Well, I suppose a lot of things may or may not be, but what I am saying is that it is a question that cannot be answered because it has not been decided yet. As Carroll pointed out, at the moment the President's economic program is the 31 point program he sent to Congress, and there has been no change in that, and that includes the surtax.

Q But you are not telling us that the President is going to push this beyond the first of the year or the end of this month?

MR. NESSEN: I am telling you I don't know, Bob, because the program has not been written yet.

Q Ron, has any decision been made on food aid?

MR. NESSEN: We don't have anything to announce on it.

Q Ron, is the President, or is the White House, going to take any position on the action of the Chinese Government in barring certain newspeople from the preview at the National Gallery on Chinese Artifacts?

MR. NESSEN: I read that in the paper. I am not aware that the White House was involved in it.

Q Well, they were not involved in it.

MR. NESSEN: I am told it was a matter between the Gallery and the People's Republic Liaison Office.

Q Is the White House disturbed about this? There have been several incidents now with the Soviet Union and now with China about their limiting press coverage of events and things which should be open to all Americans.

MR. NESSEN: Well, on the matter of the press preview, and not any of these other matters that I don't know about, the press preview had nothing to do with the White House. The White House was not involved in any way.

Q I am aware of that, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of what we can contribute to the situation.

Q It is a question of policy and attitude of this Government toward what is being done by representatives of the Chinese here in relationship to our press. Do they want to say anything from the White House as to how you view this?

MR. NESSEN: Fran, I don't know that the White House needs to say anything about a matter that is between the Liaison Office and the Museum.

Q Ron, there was some objection from the White House.

MR. NESSEN: In what sense, Dick?

Q The First Lady's Press Office said yesterday that had some reporters been barred and some allowed in, and had that gone ahead, it would have put into question whether she would have attended the dinner since all reporters were out due to the cancellation of the press preview, and she went ahead with the dinner. It does involve some objection.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to say about it. It is not a White House matter.

Q On another matter, there is a newspaper report out that Attorney General Saxbe says he will resign. Do you have any comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: You know, I think our position on personnel changes is that we will announce them when they are made.

Q Ron, is Jack Hawkins under consideration for an appointment at the White House in the political area? Do you know who Hawkins is?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't.

Q Director of the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee.

MR. NESSEN: When we have any personnel announcements to make, we will make them.

Russ.

Q Is there anything else the President realistically feels can or will be improved in this session of Congress beyond the Rockefeller confirmation, the Trade Bill, and Employment Assistance?

MR. NESSEN: The Foreign Assistance Act he would like passed.

Q Anything else?

MR. NESSEN: Well, he would like a lot of things passed.

Q Realistically, what does he feel will get through in this session?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot give you an exhaustive list of all the things he realistically hopes to pass, but those are some of the highlights certainly.

Q Ron, will the President sign the new legislation turning over the tapes to the public, wiping out the agreement between himself and former President Nixon?

MR. NESSEN: Well, as I mentioned yesterday, it is here and being studied by the lawyers. I don't have any decision to tell you.

Q Does the President feel now that the recession is the number one enemy rather than inflation? Is he ready to throw away his WIN buttons and get more buttons?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I don't know how many times I can explain to you that -- the problem is that we have an economic problem, and part of it is recession, part of it is inflation. And the President's program is designed to fight both of them.

Q But his original program was to Whip Inflation Now. Does he feel now that he has to whip recession now, or inflation now?

MR. NESSEN: Does he have to make that choice, Bob?

Q Yes.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 12:36 PM EST)