

This Copy For _____

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

#192

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:41 A.M. EDT

APRIL 21, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President spent the morning working and meeting with various members of his staff.

At 12:45, the President will meet with Dr. John Hannah. Dr. Hannah is a former Administrator of the AID office in the State Department, and he is now the Director General of the World Food Council, which is an organization sponsored by the U.N.

He is coming in here to review the work of the World Food Council. One of the projects was the World Food Conference in Rome last fall. The United States is a member of that organization.

At 5:00, the President is going to participate in the swearing-in ceremony for John Robson, the new Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board. That will be in the Rose Garden, and it is open coverage, and the President will speak there. I don't anticipate we would have any advance text, however, of what he is going to say.

At 5:30, the President is meeting with Henry Cabot Lodge.

Q Who is he?

MR. NESSEN: He is the personal representative of the President to the Vatican. There is no specific agenda for the meeting. I think they will discuss a number of issues.

Q Do you know who requested the meeting, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Peter, but it is a kind of periodic meeting he has with the President.

Q Mr. Lodge, as I understand it, has been in touch with some Vietnamese, both here and elsewhere?

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard that, but I will see if I can get some further information.

MORE

#192

AT 10:00 tonight, the President is going to be interviewed on CBS, live, by Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid and Bob Schieffer. That will be in the Blue Room of the White House, and we will have a transcript coming to you on a page-by-page basis, if you would like to do it that way.

I think, after the Chancellor-Brokaw interview some people expressed an interest in taking some photographs after the interview was over, so if there is anybody who wants to have a photo pool to go over there about 11:00, we can do that.

On tomorrow's schedule, I don't have anything for you right now, but you will get it later today or first thing in the morning.

To give you a few more details on the New Orleans trip on Wednesday -- we will have the full rundown tomorrow -- at the moment, it is shaping up this way: a press check-in at Andrews at 7:30, and the President leaving the White House at 8:30. New Orleans is one hour behind Eastern time. It is Central Daylight Time.

The first event will be the ground-breaking ceremony of the F. Edward Hebert Library, at 11:10 a.m. Central Daylight time. That will be 12:10 in the East; then, the 73rd annual Navy League Convention at 1:55 New Orleans time at the Fairmont Hotel; and in the evening at 8:15, the student body of Tulane University at the Tulane University Field House, and the President should be getting back to the White House at about 12:30 in the morning. We will have more details tomorrow. The speeches are fairly far along, and I anticipate we will have advance texts in ample time.

Q Can you give us some guidance as to topics so we can make a decision on whether to broadcast?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the drafts yet.

Q Has a news conference been ruled out down there?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it has been.

Q What about a visit to an oil rig?

MR. NESSEN: If there is anything to add to the schedule, we will have it for you tomorrow.

Q Can you tell us what the F. Edward Hebert Library is? Is it a public library or a university library?

MR. NESSEN: Why don't you call Warren and see if you can get a few more details on it.

There is one other trip this week, which is Friday, to the 150th anniversary convocation dinner at Yale Law School, from which the President graduated.

At the moment, it looks like the President will be leaving here about 5:00 or 5:30 and speak up there at 9:50, and get back to the White House at about midnight. We will have more details on that as the week goes on, plus a text.

There are two personnel matters today involving the top health positions at HEW.

The President is going to nominate Dr. Theodore Cooper, of Bethesda, Maryland, to be the Assistant Secretary of HEW for Health; and Dr. Donald Sharp Frederickson, of Bethesda, to be Director of the National Institutes of Health. I think you have biographies of both those gentlemen.

The President is sending to Congress today the ninth and tenth special messages on rescissions and deferrals. We have a packet of material that explains them, and will have that ready to give you right at the end of this briefing.

John Carlson is here to answer your questions. It was sent on Friday, but we have the material here today, and John will be able to answer your questions about it.

While we are waiting to find out more details about the Hebert Library, I don't have --

Q Ron, that is a private library on the lake front.

MR. NESSEN: We should have asked Ed. It is on the lake front and is a private library.

Q Can you give us anything on Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Such as?

Q Such as, what have they talked about this morning on Vietnam?

Q President Thieu is rather bitter about resigning, claiming that the United States had sold out South Vietnam to the Communists in an agreement in October 1972. Do you have any response to that?

MR. NESSEN: Let me say one thing first. All of you know, I think, that Dr. Kissinger has a morning meeting here with the President every morning of the week, so Dr. Kissinger was not called to the White House this morning because of this. He comes here every morning to talk to the President. I think most of you know that.

Q Does he always spend an hour with him?

MR. NESSEN: From 9:15 to 10:15 every morning, Fran, five days a week, sometimes six. I think most of you know that.

Q What is the point of your saying that?

MR. NESSEN: Because every time there is a major development overseas, there are stories that the President summoned Dr. Kissinger to the White House.

Q It is a routine meeting?

Q He came here this morning on his own?

MR. NESSEN: It is his daily meeting. Every morning he does it.

Q How long was he with the President?

MR. NESSEN: According to the wires, an hour and five minutes, which sounds right to me, which is five minutes longer than his usual meeting.

Q Did they have phone calls in relation to Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what phone calls they had, Steve.

Q Who attended that meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Sometimes Brent; usually Brent.

Q Was he there today?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Do you want to respond to the question?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I want to go back and respond to the question. For one thing, the text and official translation of President Thieu's speech has not been completed yet. He just made the speech an hour or so ago, and I don't have any comment on his remarks.

Q Do you want to respond to what the President and Secretary talked about?

MR. NESSEN: Every morning they do the same thing.

Q What did they talk about this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I assume they talked about Vietnam.

Q Do you have a reaction to the resignation itself, and what effect do you think it will have on the overall situation?

Q Will the Administration still ask for military and humanitarian aid for Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: Let me do one at a time.

President Thieu resigned under the procedures of the South Vietnamese constitution, and the United States expects to be working with the new government.

The other question had to do with the request for military and humanitarian aid, and the President still believes that those requests should be approved for the reasons that he has stated.

Q Ron, may I repeat my question, which you didn't answer? My question was, the meeting between the President and the Secretary, since they talked about Vietnam, can you tell us some of the aspects?

MR. NESSEN: I can't.

Q Ron, does the President have any feeling of regret about President Thieu's resignation? Is he sorry to see him go? Is he happy to see him go?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it was done under the procedures of the South Vietnamese constitution, and the United States does expect to work with the new government. I don't know that any further comment is needed.

Q Thieu said it was done under American pressure. Was it done under American pressure?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any comment on that.

Q Did you say that he still believes that military aid should be sent? I didn't hear it.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did the President send any message to President Thieu in the wake of the resignation?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Did the United States play any role in persuading Mr. Thieu to resign?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I will comment on the resignation beyond what I have said. I will point out that Secretary Kissinger is testifying on the Hill at 3:00 where one of the House committees will have certainly an opportunity to ask him some of these questions and the President, himself, will be on television tonight, where I am sure he will be asked some of these questions.

Q Ron, we conceded that we really didn't know anything about Thieu's decisions on those withdrawals. Did we know anything about this? Were we notified ahead of time in any orderly, diplomatic way?

MR. NESSEN: Steve, I am not going to go beyond what I said on the resignation.

Q You can't tell whether or not the American Government knew about it?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Can you tell us anything about how the President learned of this?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Why not?

MR. NESSEN: It has happened, and he knows about it, knew about it.

Q You don't think this is a legitimate question?

MR. NESSEN: I do, Bill, but --

Q You say he knew about it. Did he know about it after it happened, or did he know about it before it happened?

MR. NESSEN: Mort, I am not going to go down that trail, I might as well tell you right now.

Q You said he knew about it?

MR. NESSEN: He knew about it when it happened.

Q He knew when it happened?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Then he did not have advance warning?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going down that trail, Marty, I can tell you.

Q You did.

MR. NESSEN: You better tell me how I did, Marty, so I can back off.

Q You can back off without me telling you how.
(Laughter)

Q You said he knew about it when it happened?

MR. NESSEN: Didn't we all? It happened on television.

Q Did he have any special advance knowledge, is the question.

MR. NESSEN: What was the other thing?

Q About the Americans in Saigon and the Vietnamese, too, working for the Americans. Is there any provision for them to get out?

MR. NESSEN: I think you know the thinning out process is continuing, as the President directed. Those Americans whose positions are no longer considered essential, and the Vietnamese dependents, and other dependents are leaving.

Q Ron, since the Paris agreement was made with the Thieu government, is there any thought now of renewing or having a new Paris conference to discuss the situation?

MR. NESSEN: The President just last week sent diplomatic messages to the Paris signatories.

Q Has he renewed that request in view of the changed situation?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware that he has.

MORE

Q Has the thinning out process been altered by the action of President Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard that it has.

Q Do you know whether there are any contacts now being made with either the VC or the North Vietnamese by this Government?

MR. NESSEN: I don't, Peter. I think in addition to Dr. Kissinger and the President both being in the position today to be questioned publicly about this, some of those more technical questions can be answered perhaps at the State and Defense Departments.

Q Can you tell us if the President was dissatisfied with the action of Ambassador Martin in the first days of the thinning out, and can you confirm the reports that he personally sent a cable to Ambassador Martin telling him to step up the action?

Q Question?

MR. NESSEN: The question was, is the President personally unhappy with Ambassador Martin's actions in the early days, and did he send a cable to Ambassador Martin about this subject --

Q -- telling him to speed up the thinning out process.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to give you on that.

Q Ron, in view of all that has happened in Vietnam over the past decade, and in view of your rather terse statement here that Thieu resigned under constitutional procedures and we expect to be working with the new government, can we expect a more substantive statement from the President this evening in his interview in terms of the reaction and the course of future U.S. policy in Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: I think you will have to wait and see, Walt. I am sure he will be asked about it.

Q Ron, over the weekend there was a very interesting editorial cartoon, which motivates this question. Since the United States Government spent so many millions of dollars in equipping San Clemente and Key Biscayne and since Mr. Nixon has been identified by President Thieu as having made promises, would the Administration suggest to Mr. Nixon that Mr. Nol and Mr. Thieu be given some of that land? I mean, there is a lot of money that has been invested in that, and these refugees -- would he be willing to ask Mr. Nixon if he would be willing to help two refugees?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any plans along that line, Les.

Q Aren't your comments about President Thieu somewhat different from those about Lon Nol when he stepped down? It seems to me either when Lon Nol resigned, or just prior to his resignation, you made the statement that it was not the place of the United States to recommend that a popularly elected leader step down, and I am not hearing that today about President Thieu, I am just hearing no comment.

I wonder, are you prepared to make the same kind of statement that you did about Lon Nol, that Thieu was popularly elected and it was not the place of the United States to urge him or to recommend in any way that he resign?

MR. NESSEN: I think what I am saying, John, is that he did resign under their processes of their constitution, which is the same thing that happened in Cambodia.

Q But in Cambodia you did go further, as my memory recollects it, which was that it was not the place of the United States to recommend, privately or publicly --

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has said that himself as recently as the ASNE speech. If I remember, he was asked that question, and he said virtually those words, that we were not going to play the role of urging or preventing whatever the people in the government of Vietnam decided they wanted to do about their leader.

Q You can stand by that, but your no comment on this today does not negate what the President said --

MR. NESSEN: I try never to negate what the President has said.

Q It is still the White House position that the United States played no role in the resignation of President Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever the President said on that question, I am certainly not going to negate it, John.

Q Why do we have to wait until ten o'clock tonight to get any substantive comment from the President?

MR. NESSEN: I have given you about all the substantive comment there is at this time.

Q Is this the only reaction he had?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is this thing coordinated with the State Department's briefing? Will the same statement be given out?

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

Q Are there any plans to bring Ambassador Martin back from Saigon?

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

Q Will President Thieu be welcome in this country if he asks to come?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is a little premature to talk about that.

Q Did the President express any disappointment, or say anything about Congress in its response to his request for military aid? Is there anything along this line at the present date?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Does the President think the case for the aid is increased by this action, by Thieu's departure?

MR. NESSEN: I think he has given his reasons for asking for the aid, and they remain unchanged.

Q President Thieu, when he resigned, according to the wire, said he had received written assurances from the Nixon Administration that he would receive all U.S. aid necessary under the terms of the Paris accords should that become necessary.

Is it still the position of this Administration there were no secret agreements?

MR. NESSEN: We went around, Walt, about three days in a row on that thing.

Q I understand that, but President Thieu is now talking about what could be construed as a secret agreement --

MR. NESSEN: Who construes it as that?

Q Anybody who read what he said construes it as that. He said he got written assurances.

MR. NESSEN: Gene, I think we exhausted this subject last week, or whenever it was, and there is nothing really now to add to what we said.

Q This is a new factor, Ron. None of the questions last week dealt with the statement by President Thieu that he had received written agreements for the very simple reason he had not made the statement. This is a new development, and we would like your comment as to whether it is still the Administration's contention that there were no secret agreements.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Jim, we went around and at that point there were various Vietnamese officials saying more or less the same thing. I think we did pretty much lay out what had happened during that period, and there is nothing changed on that.

MORE

Q Your position remains unchanged, there were no secret agreements?

MR. NESSEN: I have nothing to add to what we talked about last week.

Q Excuse me. Whether you add it or not, is it your position that there was no secret agreement?

MR. NESSEN: There was nothing said in private that was not in substance said in public.

Q You mean said later or at the time?

MR. NESSEN: I don't understand your question, Ted.

Q I think you do understand. President Thieu says they had written assurances in October, or in the Fall of 1972, that the United States would provide all aid needed to fight off the Communists.

The things that you said were stated publicly began in March and April of 1973.

My question is: Are the statements that you said were made public, were they made at the time the assurances were given, or were they made months later?

MR. NESSEN: I think, as I said, we went all around this ground last week and what we came up with was that the assurances were given during the period of negotiation -- which I think somebody asked me about at that time -- and I think you are familiar with the dates of the public statements, which are, in substance, the same thing.

Q Ron, the French government has suggested, now that Thieu has stepped down, they are asking the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese to negotiate. Have we had any word back from them? Have we had any word back from that? Do we know of the French offer and can you comment on that?

MR. NESSEN: Only to say that the United States has said always that there should be a negotiated settlement in Vietnam.

Q Ron, is the President in agreement with the Vice President's published comment of last week that the spread of Communism could well become a political issue next year?

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has spoken for himself on his views about that issue. He was asked that, I think, at ASNE.

Q Ron, now that both parties to the communications of 1972 are out of office, is there any reason why those documents now cannot be made public?

MR. NESSEN: As you know, there is a request here from Senator Sparkman and I have not heard what the White House response is to that. It is being studied.

Q Ron, when Lon Nol quit, you indicated that he would be welcome in the U.S. I am wondering why you can't say the same for General Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen anything that indicates General Thieu intends to leave Vietnam.

Q That is not really the question. Would he be welcome here if he wanted to come?

MR. NESSEN: It is difficult to answer the question. He seems to be staying in his country at the moment.

If he indicates he does want to come here, I will check and find out what the view is.

Q Some of his remarks were pretty inflammatory this morning. Does the President feel this might endanger the safety of the Americans that are left there?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the official translation has not been prepared or wasn't when I checked.

Q Will there be any speeding up of the thinning out process?

MR. NESSEN: It is going ahead.

Q Ron, does the President think this new government will be able to survive in the event of a Communist takeover?

MR. NESSEN: Again, I think Secretary Kissinger and the President will both be speaking on the record today and I think we will just wait and get their assessments at the time.

Q Will Kissinger be on the record?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know.

Q There was talk of it being private.

MR. NESSEN: It is supposed to be an open session of the House Appropriations Committee.

Q Ron, do you think the President was taken by surprise at the news of the resignation of President Thieu?

MR. NESSEN: I think I will just leave it the way I have stated it.

Q Some of the Americans that were leaving Saigon yesterday said that they were being held up, their evacuation was being held up because of bureaucratic red tape by the South Vietnam government.

Has there been any sort of request by the White House, or anyone in the Administration to clear up and make those evacuations a little bit faster and eliminate the red tape?

MR. NESSEN: The Pentagon is the one, and the State Department, that I think would have more details on that, Bob.

Q In answer to Mort Kondracke's question earlier, Ron, about whether the letters from Nixon to Thieu will be released, you seemed to indicate that now, indeed, they might be.

You said that the request had been received by the White House and it is being studied.

MR. NESSEN: I said what I said last week.

Q Do you anticipate that events of today may change things and that we may see the release in the next few days of these letters?

MR. NESSEN: You mean would the resignation of Thieu affect what would have been the legal counsel's opinion as to whether to release them or not?

Q You have asked the question so much better than I, why don't you answer it?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, that is not the question -- what the legal counsel says.

The question is: Would it make it more likely they would be released whether or not it is the legal counsel's advice or not?

MR. NESSEN: It will not make it more or less likely.

Q Ron, has the President, or anyone in the Administration, sent a note or had any communication with the new government congratulating it and pledging cooperation?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure, Phil. I have not heard of one but you should check with the State Department and I will check.

Q President Thieu has been a long-time allied leader --

MR. NESSEN: I think what Dr. Kissinger said was that South Vietnam is our ally. He said that the other day, I believe.

Q Don't you think it passing strange that the President's chief spokesman wouldn't be able to tell us whether he was surprised, regretful, happy about the departure or the resignation of the head of a government that has been a long-standing ally of the United States?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I think what I want to do is to stick with what I have said. We will have an opportunity to hear the President's personal reactions tonight.

Q Ron, has Dean Brown taken over his job yet? And if so, what are his duties. Could you give us more details?

Q And a phone number.

MR. NESSEN: We will get that.

Q Meanwhile, can you tell us is the President going to replace John Scali, with Mr. Moynihan, and when?

MR. NESSEN: The President considers Ambassador Scali to be an invaluable member of the Administration. Other than that, I have no personnel announcements to make today.

Q Ron, could I try that again? Did the President express any personal reaction?

MR. NESSEN: I think I am going to stick to my answer.

Q Why couldn't we hear it now?

MR. NESSEN: I will stick to what I have said.

Q You have put us in the position where we have to boost CBS tonight. You give us a terse reply and say, tune in to CBS tonight if you really want to hear what the President thinks. (Laughter) You are plugging CBS. (Laughter)

Q Ron, would you say you have not made up your mind; you are still using a Ouija board?

MR. NESSEN: My mind?

Q I am using "you" as a plural, the Administration. How can you not have a decision before 10 o'clock tonight on how you feel about the fall of Thieu -- whether you knew about it ahead of time, whether you had any part in it, what you are going to do about it? A whole day for the American people to speculate that we pulled another Diem, or something good like that? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I didn't hear the question part.

Q The question is, what is your justification for going all day without answering any of these questions?

MR. NESSEN: Some of these questions, perhaps, will be addressed to Dr. Kissinger and the others to the President, plus what I have told you.

Q Who made the decision to stonewall it during the day?

MR. NESSEN: I disagree with the "stonewall" characterization.

Q Who made the decision not to comment? Was that a Presidential decision, a Kissinger decision, a Rumsfeld decision, a Nessen decision? Who made it?

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

Q Why didn't you, as Press Secretary, call off this briefing and say, "listen, tune in, gentlemen and ladies, to CBS," if you have no comment on this terribly important news thing. I think Steve's question is enormously pertinent. I mean, we enjoy being with you, Ron -- (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The feeling is mutual, Les.

Q If you are not going to answer this, could I go to another question?

MR. NESSEN: Let me answer a question back there on Ambassador Brown's phone number, which is 632-3840.

Q Is he in the White House or somewhere else?

MR. NESSEN: A "632" number would indicate the State Department.

What Ambassador Brown will do is to serve as a coordinator because there are a number of Government agencies and departments who are involved in different aspects of refugee, humanitarian relief, and evacuation. The President felt that he wanted to have a special representative as a coordinator of all the activities.

Q Is he paid on a kind of daily consultant basis, or how?

MR. NESSEN: I have not checked out what his pay arrangements are.

Q Is he now in Washington or is he in Saigon? Can you update any figures on the thinning out process?

MR. NESSEN: No, he is here. I think we said the other day, and I think it is probably a wise policy, that we won't give a daily countdown on Americans in Saigon.

Q A slightly related question -- I wasn't here on Friday and if you answered it then, forgive me -- has any thought been given to recognizing the new government in Cambodia? What is the position of this Administration to the new Cambodian government?

MR. NESSEN: I think it was asked, and I think what we said is still true, that it is a little premature to make that decision.

MORE

Q Do you think you might see the President sometime before ten o'clock?

MR. NESSEN: I expect I will.

Q If you do, could you ask him all of these questions about reaction, et cetera, et cetera, about President Thieu, up and down, unhappy; you know, all the questions, and if he does respond, could you let us know at whatever hour it is?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

Q Could we have an afternoon briefing?

MR. NESSEN: I will do that, and will make sure that you all know what the answers are, if there are any.

Q Ron, can you also try to make Ambassador Lodge available to us after his meeting with the President?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly will ask him.

Q Ron, regarding Dr. Kaunda's statement, I have already checked with the State Department, and they confirmed the fact that Dr. Kaunda has only one political party in his country. When I asked, does the same lack of freedom apply to the press, they had no comment.

My question is this: Does the President approve of a one-party system, and why did he have no comment when asked about Dr. Kaunda's rather trenchant toast?

MR. NESSEN: Who was it that had no comment?

Q The President, I gather. It was reported that when reporters asked the President about Dr. Kaunda's provocative toast, the President, from what I understand -- I was not there. Do you have a comment? Is there anything about Kaunda that the President has to say? I gather there was no comment.

MR. NESSEN: I think if you look at the geography of the area, you will see that President Kaunda's strong views are understandable. His country borders on Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola. I think the President made it clear in his own toast on Saturday night that the United States does support self-determination for people in that area, and he also supports President Kaunda's own efforts for change in that area, through peaceful negotiations and through understanding between the various parties concerned with the matter.

The President promised in his toast the continued support of the United States as the various parties seek to resolve their problems at the conference table.

Q Do you have any additional information for us, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: As for President Kaunda's statement concerning American policy in Africa, at his meeting with President Kaunda, President Ford reaffirmed that the United States is intent on developing a closer relationship with the countries of Africa and that the primary goal of American policy in Africa is to increase both American understanding and cooperation with the countries of Africa.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:17 P.M. EDT)